

# THE LIFE OF LORD CARSON

VOLUME THREE  
**THE LIFE OF LORD CARSON**  
by  
**IAN COLVIN**

LONDON  
VICTOR GOLLANCZ LTD  
1936



*Printed in Great Britain by*  
The Camelot Press Ltd., London and Southampton

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## AUTHOR'S NOTE

BESIDES those to whom he made grateful acknowledgements in his previous volume, the thanks of the Author are due to Lady Milner and Mrs. Dugdale for allowing him to quote from the letters of Lord Milner and Lord Balfour, to Sir Wilfrid and Lady Spender for copies of their correspondence during the war, to Lord Lloyd for help in reconstructing a famous weekend, to Mr. H. M. Pollock for his expert assistance in the affairs of Belfast, to Mr. Moles of the *Belfast Telegraph* for his excellent photographs, and to Mr. Merrifield for the print of his noble bronze which serves as frontispiece to this volume. To many other kind friends and correspondents he offers thanks, no less heartfelt because, for lack of space, he must leave them unenumerated.

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## CHAPTER I

### *Week-End at Wargrave*

Letter to Miss Frewen - *Couriers of War* - Carson returns - Lansdowne House -  
Bonar Law writes a letter - Fateful decisions - Churchill's tears.

SIR EDWARD CARSON, at the mature age of sixty-five, had come through seven years of civic strife so fierce as to threaten civil war. He had inspired and confirmed if he had not led the Opposition to the Third Home Rule Bill and was indeed the Leader of the Irish Unionist Party. Although he had not defeated the Government, he had brought it to a stand. If he looked for rest and retirement his destiny held other things in store. As at the opening of our second volume so at the beginning of our third, he stood on the threshold of great events. His duty again was to overrule his inclination. He was to play his part in a darker tragedy upon a larger stage.

The failure of the Buckingham Palace Conference coincided with the murder of the Archduke Franz Ferdinand. The British Prime Minister had raised a startled eye from the map of Ulster to see the cloud of menace rolling from the Danube to the Rhine. On the 30th July, 1914, as we saw in our last volume, Mr. Asquith agreed with Sir Edward Carson and Mr. Bonar Law to postpone the Amending Bill to a more convenient season, while these three and John Redmond formed front to meet the foreign foe. We are now to consider how this crisis broke into an English week-end, and failed to stop not this time a game of bowls but a game of lawn tennis.

At Homburg, the year before, Carson had met and fallen in love with an English lady, Ruby Frewen. They were engaged to be married, and as she was staying at her father's house in Somerset, it came about that Carson wrote her from London, on the evening of an eventful day, Thursday, the 30th July, 1914:

"After all, the Bill was postponed to-day, and rightly so,

owing to the gravity of the European situation. I have had a very busy trying day and I am going out to Burdett-Coutts to dinner in the country. To-morrow I will go to Wargrave and Bonar Law will motor me there. I am oh ! so tired. . . ."

Wargrave Hall, overlooking one of the most pleasant reaches of the Thames, was the home of another Irishman, "Paddy" Goulding, afterwards Lord Wargrave, who had invited Carson, Bonar Law, F. E. Smith and Max Aitken, for what was to be an interrupted week-end.

On Saturday afternoon, when Carson was on the river and Bonar Law and F. E. were on the tennis-court, a motor car brought two heralds of dire events from Town, George Lloyd (later Lord Lloyd) and Lord Charles Beresford. These two sat down on a bank and waited until the end of the game; then George Lloyd unfolded almost incredible tidings in the ear of Bonar Law.

The future High Commissioner for Egypt, then a young Member of Parliament, had been closely watching affairs in Europe, and had come to the shrewd conclusion that on the murder at Sarajevo impended war. What interested him particularly were the reactions of the British Government to that event, and he was much disturbed in mind by a remark dropped by the Prime Minister on Thursday. ". . . this country," Mr. Asquith had said, "which has no interests of its own directly at stake . . ." It was a phrase which might have implied much or little: to the young Conservative it suggested that the British Government did not propose to stand by France and Russia.

Burdened with this suspicion, Lloyd had gone to the French Embassy where his friend, Charles Roux, assailed him—almost rudely: "*Si seulement vous nous aviez dit il-y-a deux jours que vous alliez nous lâcher !*"

"What on earth do you mean ?" said Lloyd.

"Go upstairs and see the Ambassador," Roux retorted gloomily, as he set out to join his regiment in France.

The hour was late; but M. Cambon was an old friend, and when Lloyd went up, the Ambassador held out both hands to him. "*Monsieur Georges,*" he asked, "*il vous reste de l'honneur dans votre pays ?*" It was hardly a tolerable remark from any foreigner, however friendly, and Lloyd, stiffening,

asked His Excellency to explain himself. Then M. Cambon told him that he had just seen Sir Edward Grey, who had led him to understand that under no conditions would they fight.

"That is what he said," M. Cambon proceeded in a voice which trembled. "He seemed to forget that it was on your advice, and under your guarantee, that we moved all our ships to the south and our munitions to Toulon. Si vous restez neutres, nos côtes sont livrées aux Allemands."

Then M. Cambon told Lloyd how Grey had pleaded not only difficulties in his own party, but lack of support from the Conservatives; and on this point, at least, Lloyd had something to reply: he was able to tell M. Cambon of assurances given to the Prime Minister by Mr. Bonar Law.

George Lloyd was not alone in these doubts and activities. Leo Maxse, his close friend, had rung up the Director of Military Operations, at 7 Draycott Place, and Henry Wilson had replied, "We are in the soup"—meaning the soup not of war but of neutrality. Together they sounded Count Benckendorff, the Russian Ambassador, who confirmed the gloomy apprehensions of M. Cambon. What was to be done? It was already Saturday: they dared not wait until Monday, yet all the Leaders of the Opposition were out of Town for that rural ritual, the week-end. There was one fortunate exception: the Chief Conservative Whip, Lord Edmund Talbot, was in London, and he readily agreed on the urgency of the case. They must bring their leaders together.

They telegraphed to Lord Lansdowne at Bowood; Mr. Balfour, who was at Hatfield, promised to come up after dinner to Lansdowne House; Mr. Amery was sent down to Broadstairs to bring up Mr. Austen Chamberlain; the Duke of Devonshire was also summoned, and, as we have seen, Mr. George Lloyd and Lord Charles Beresford went down to Wargrave in search of Mr. Bonar Law.

The date, amid some confusion of evidence, is fixed for us by Sir Henry Wilson's Diaries. On Saturday, the 1st August, he wrote:

"At 11.30 a.m. Asquith wrote to C.I.G.S. saying training was not to be suspended, and putting on record the fact that the Government had never promised the French an Expeditionary

Force. Percy (later Duke of Northumberland) to lunch: he arranged to send George Lloyd and Charlie Beresford for Bonar Law to Wargrave. . . . I went to the French Embassy. . . . M. Cambon very bitter, though personally charming."<sup>1</sup>

The Leader of the Opposition heard George Lloyd impatiently. He had been unwittingly misled by F. E. Smith, who had heard, from Winston Churchill that everything was going well - and indeed everything was going well at the Admiralty. Moreover, Bonar Law had made his mind known to the Prime Minister, and was therefore of opinion that there was no more to be done. Lloyd, in despair, appealed to Beresford and left the two together in the conservatory, where he could hear the Irish sailor storming at the Scottish statesman until the subsidence of sound signalled the end of the battle. Then Bonar Law emerged, and with his patient long-enduring smile, said to Lloyd: "As you feel the matter is so important, I will motor back after dinner to-night; but I think it quite unnecessary."

Lord Beaverbrook, writing some twelve years after the event, is disappointingly vague as to what happened at Wargrave, and may have been imperfectly informed of what was going on.<sup>2</sup> It is certain, however, that Mr. Bonar Law returned to Town, before or after dinner, and was present at the meeting of the Opposition Leaders which took place at Lansdowne House at midnight on Saturday, the 1st August.<sup>3</sup>

Carson returned to Wargrave Hall from the river to find Bonar Law gone; but he also had had a visitor from Town—and on a similar errand. It happened that Captain Wilfrid Spender of the Ulster Volunteer Force had received orders from the War Office to join the Staff of the Eastern Coast Defences; had set out from Belfast "with the General's approval" (the General being Sir George Richardson in command of the Ulster Volunteers); had arrived at Chatham to find himself unwanted for the moment; had thereupon run up to London and called on some old military friends of the Committee of Imperial Defence at Whitehall Gardens, and had there heard the same disquieting rumours of growing indecision in the Government. He had even

<sup>1</sup> Callwell, vol. I., p. 154.

<sup>2</sup> *Politicians and the War, 1914-1916*, by Lord Beaverbrook, vol. I., p. 24.

<sup>3</sup> Lord Newton is in error when he says that this meeting took place on Sunday 2nd August—see his *Life of Lansdowne*, p. 489.

been told that one reason alleged for the official attitude was fear of trouble in Ireland from the Ulster Volunteer Force should the regular army be withdrawn.

Now Captain Spender, when at the War Office in 1911-12, had been concerned in the scheme of defence for the United Kingdom, and knew that in the event of war all four regular divisions in Great Britain were to be withdrawn; but that the other two, the Fourth and Sixth, were to remain in Ireland. Knowing all this, he assured his friends of the Committee of Imperial Defence that the Ulster Volunteer Force not only need cause no anxiety, but might be relied upon, if required, to take the place of these two divisions. And as his friends were urgent on the need for some action by the Conservative leaders to hearten the Cabinet, he offered to go down to Wargrave and put the case before Carson.

Major Spender is under the impression that Carson received these ideas favourably and wrote two letters which Spender took back to Town and delivered; but to whom these letters were addressed he has completely forgotten. Such lapses of memory are as tantalising to the biographer as they are inevitable when the broad obliterating streams of time and of war lie between the present and the past. Sir Edward Carson himself had more entirely forgotten the incident; but what is certain is that he set to work to reassure the Government as to Ulster, for *The Times* of Saturday the 1st August, 1914, contained the following paragraph:

"Sir Edward Carson, in reply to a correspondent, has stated that if required by the Government, a large body of Ulster Volunteers will be willing and ready to give their services for Home Defence and many will be willing to serve anywhere they are required."

Carson returned to London either on the Saturday night or on the Sunday morning: he was not present at the midnight meeting at Lansdowne House. Of that meeting, however, I have an account from Lord Lloyd, the only man (except the Duke of Devonshire) now living who was there. Lloyd, under the impression that his leaders would never listen to a "mere back-bencher's story," had persuaded Henry Wilson to go with him, and they went in together.

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"I can see the picture now as we were shown in, Henry Wilson following me in a black Inverness cape and an opera hat, looking for all the world like a gaunt conspirator. As we were announced Lansdowne was sitting primly at his table in the middle of the room facing us. The Duke of Devonshire was half-asleep on a sofa. Bonar was chatting in a corner by the fire . . . I think it was with Balfour. Lansdowne asked me why I had telegraphed for him, which gave me an opportunity for telling my story. . . . Henry Wilson, in his turn, told his story from the inside. . . . Lord Lansdowne, who showed a great decision and clarity, turned to Bonar and said: 'Bonar, we must get hold of the Prime Minister to-night,' and asked him to telephone to Bonham-Carter.

"Presently Bonar returned with the reply that Mr. Asquith was asleep and could not be disturbed by anyone. It was thereupon decided to draft the now famous ultimatum to the Government. I am sure I remember being told at the time, I think by Lansdowne, that no opposition had ever ventured to give written advice to a Government before. The memorandum was rapidly drafted by Lansdowne, impressing upon Government the vital importance of standing true to our obligations to France and Russia and pledging the whole support of the Conservative Party to such a policy."

Next morning (Sunday, August 2nd) there was another meeting, either at Bonar Law's house or at some Conservative club—there is a conflict of evidence—Carson and Austen Chamberlain being among those present. Bonar Law, after reading the memorandum, sat down and wrote his brief revision:

"DEAR MR. ASQUITH,—Lord Lansdowne and I feel it our duty to inform you that in our opinion, as well as that of all the colleagues whom we have been able to consult, it would be fatal to the honour and security of the United Kingdom to hesitate in supporting France and Russia at this juncture, and we offer our unhesitating support to the Government in any measures they may consider necessary for that object.

"Yours very truly,

"A. BONAR LAW.

"August 2, 1914."

Lord Newton is mistaken in the date on which this missive was delivered. Mr. Maxse says that it was "taken by Lord Lansdowne's car to No. 10 Downing Street, where the Cabinet was then sitting, shortly after midday" on Sunday, and he is almost certainly right. The letter (by design) was not marked private and it came into Mr. Asquith's hands at a most opportune moment.

The Government seemed to be hopelessly divided: there is a balance of testimony that the majority of Ministers were at that time against intervention in the European quarrel. "They calculated," says Lord Morley, "to a tune of eight or nine men in the Cabinet likely to agree with us." Morley felt confident enough to tap Churchill on the shoulder and say, "Winston, we have beaten you after all." Grey had intimated that "if the Cabinet was for neutrality, he did not think that he was the man to carry out such a policy"; the Prime Minister, who said he would not be separated from Grey, worked, after his manner, astutely and carefully, to the main end of preserving his Cabinet. Morley reports that on Sunday Grey seemed to be weakening: "He professed to stand by what he had told Cambon in his letter of 1912, that we were left perfectly free to decide whether we would assist France by armed force. We were not committed, he always said, to action in a contingency that had not yet arisen and might never arise." Yet on Sunday afternoon Morley began to have doubts of his friends, although they were still "on the surface . . . pretty stalwart." On Monday the Prime Minister accepted four resignations, two of which were subsequently withdrawn; the "Beauchamp cave" had collapsed. Why?

Morley's memorandum on that crisis bears a puzzled aspect; it does not even mention the letter as a possible explanation; but it quotes Mr. Asquith's speech in the Cabinet on Monday morning. Asquith had said, "Then the idea of a coalition naturally occurs to one. . . ." He had deprecated coalitions. Still, the idea "naturally occurs to one." It was enough: indeed it was more than enough. Asquith no doubt had read the letter of Bonar Law to his colleagues on the Sunday; he had allowed it to sink in, and drove the point home next day—"Then the idea of a coalition naturally occurs to one."



Morley was chiefly astonished by the change in the Chancellor of the Exchequer, who had seemed to him one of those most devoted to neutrality. "The motives of Lloyd George," says Morley, "were a riddle." In retrospect Mr. Lloyd George himself says that "Belgium" was responsible for the change and marks the 4th of August, when Belgium was invaded, as the "fateful" date of "decision." He even blames Sir Edward Grey for neglecting to put the Belgian case to his colleagues. "Had the question," he says, "of defending the neutrality and integrity of Belgium been raised there would not have been a dissentient voice on that issue."<sup>1</sup> As a fact, the question had been raised. "In the course of these conversations," says Lord Beaverbrook, "Mr. Lloyd George demonstrated to his friends with a map how small an infraction of neutrality such a military move would imply. He marked on the map with his finger the direction he thought the German march through Belgium would take. 'You see,' he would say, 'it is only a little bit, and the Germans will pay for any damage they do.'"<sup>2</sup>

By the night of Sunday, the 2nd August, two days before Belgium was invaded, Mr. Lloyd George had already made up his mind, for he then told his friend, Lord Riddell, to tell Sir John French that he was to cross the Channel in command of a British army.<sup>3</sup> It is certain, at all events, that it was made up on Monday, and we may ascribe the change with some confidence to Bonar Law's letter, the contents of which the Prime Minister poured into the minds of his colleagues, as a chemist might pour a catalytic into a cloudy test-tube, to effect an instantaneous precipitation. "The idea of a coalition naturally occurs to one"—a coalition from which the Peace Party would naturally be omitted.

Such were the momentous consequences which flowed from that Bank Holiday week-end under the elms and willows of the untroubled Thames. It was Carson's part to convey to the Prime Minister, either directly or through the Press, what was to be expected of Ulster. Mr. Asquith, on his side, did not neglect the factor of Ireland: at three o'clock on the afternoon of Monday, the 3rd August, he had a private meeting with John

<sup>1</sup> David Lloyd George, *War Memoirs*, vol. I., pp. 66-71.

<sup>2</sup> *Politicians and the War*, p. 29.

<sup>3</sup> Lord Riddell, *War Diaries*, p. 6.

Redmond, and Sir Edward Grey, later that afternoon, was able to assure the House of Commons—"One thing I would say: the one bright spot in the very dreadful situation is Ireland. The position in Ireland—and this I should like to be clearly understood abroad—is not a consideration among the things we have to take into account now."

Carson, as Sir Edward Grey made that gravely decisive speech, saw tears trickling down the cheek of Winston Churchill, and knowing that he, of all the Ministers, had never wavered in that great crisis, Carson went up to him as they passed out behind the Speaker's chair and silently shook hands.

## CHAPTER II

### *Recruiting in Ulster*

Carson and the Volunteers—Redmond makes an offer—These two meet—Carson and Kitchener—Kitchener and Redmond—Carson and Asquith—Asquith and Redmond—Carson in Belfast—Bonar Law walks out.

UNDER the averted eyes of Englishmen, more than ever impatient of the issue, the Loyalists and Nationalists of Ireland pursued their jealous quarrel like the Dog and the Cat in Maeterlinck's *Blue Bird*.

"‘I was encouraging them to do their duty bravely and conscientiously,’ says the Cat. ‘Unfortunately the Dog, who kept on interrupting me . . .’

"‘What’s that?’ growls the Dog. ‘Just wait a bit! My little God, you don’t know; it was he who . . .’”

On or before the 31st July Sir Edward Carson, acting on a telegram from James Craig,<sup>1</sup> sent the following message to the headquarters of the Volunteers:

“All officers, non-commissioned officers and men who are enrolled in the Ulster Volunteer Force, and who are liable to be called out by His Majesty for service in the present crisis, are requested to answer immediately to His Majesty’s call, as our first duty as loyal subjects is to the King.”

The King of Spain was so puzzled by this paradox of loyal rebels that he asked Carson if the Ulster Volunteers had not really been organised with the secret connivance of the Government; but in England at that moment the loyalty of Ulster was taken as a matter of course.

What made a real sensation were the assurances of Mr. Redmond, who followed Sir Edward Grey and Mr. Bonar Law on the Monday afternoon. “. . . If the dire necessity is forced upon this country,” he said, “we offer to the Government of the day that they may take their troops away, and that, if it is

<sup>1</sup> See vol. II., p. 422.

allowed to us, in comradeship with our brethren in the North, we will ourselves defend the coasts of our country.”<sup>1</sup>

Tim Healy, cynical even in that crisis, wrote to his brother of Redmond's offer—“ I fancy he would not have made it without getting his price as to Home Rule ”; but we need not suppose that the motive was mercenary. At such moments men are apt to act upon the instinct of the blood, and it is even possible that the first of that race, Raymond (Redmond) Fitzwilliam de Carew, Commander of all the English Forces and Viceroy of Ireland under a Norman King, may have spoken through the mouth of his remote descendant. But the other half of Tim Healy's comment is certainly true: Redmond was to be embarrassed by the reactions of that speech on the extremists of his own party.

The Nationalist Leader was a man of courage: on the previous day he had received a warning of the temper of those Irish Volunteers whom he could not control and of whom he was thus disposing. “ If there is any hesitation on the part of the Government in getting the King to sign the Home Rule Bill immediately ” (so their Inspector-General had written to him from Derry) “ the Irish Reservists ought to be told not to join, and the men of the Special Reserve (old Militia) ought not to join,” and when he returned to his room he found a telegram from the same address: “ Army and Naval Reserve met, decided to refuse join colours until assured that King will sign Home Rule Bill.” Redmond's influence sufficed to reverse this decision, and he hotly denied that he made terms with the Government in that crisis; but, bargain or no bargain, the Home Rule Bill on the Statute Book was more than ever a necessity to his political existence in Ireland.

It was a season, as Mr. Churchill had predicted, when political enmities were forgotten. Churchill himself, who had played a true Englishman's part in the crisis, received a warm letter of congratulation from Carson, and (on 5th August) replied from the Admiralty in terms no less cordial:

“ MY DEAR CARSON,—Thank you so much for your letter. I am very grateful indeed to you for it. The good wishes of

<sup>1</sup> Parliamentary Debates, House of Commons, 3rd August, 1914.

my father's friends are dear to me: and yours I value especially.

"I hope we shall sometimes in the future be able to act together.

"Yours sincerely,

"WINSTON S. CHURCHILL."

Mr. Asquith, on his side, had made his Party Truce with the Unionist leaders: as by the touch of a fairy wand the House of Commons was turned into a palace of the Sleeping Beauty where every family jar—save that of the Cat and the Dog—was put asleep until the kiss of foreign peace should again awaken domestic war. As, however, his wand had touched Parliament before the Government of Ireland Bill had reached the Statute Book and before the Amending Bill had been debated, to satisfy Redmond without breaking faith with Carson was a feat to tax even the Prime Minister's ingenuity.

His first idea was to suggest a meeting between Redmond and Carson, and the interview took place on the afternoon of 5th August in the Speaker's Library, Mr. Lowther being present to keep the peace between the two Irishmen. That he barely succeeded is suggested by the report of the meeting which Redmond made to the Prime Minister:

"I found Sir Edward Carson in an absolutely irreconcilable mood about everything, so much so indeed that it was impossible to discuss matters calmly with him. The gist of our conversation was this—although, of course, I do not give you his words—that if the Government dared to put the Home Rule Bill on the Statute Book he and the Tory Party would obstruct the Appropriation Bill, and revive all the bitterness of the controversy. He would not listen to my suggested way out of the difficulty at all, and is evidently in the worst possible temper."<sup>1</sup>

Redmond went on to tell Asquith that if the Government allowed themselves to be "bullied in this way by Sir Edward Carson," there would be trouble both from his party and in Ireland: "It would" (moreover) "make it quite impossible for me to go to Ireland, as I desire to do, and to translate into action the spirit of my speech the other day."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Denis Gwynn, *Life of John Redmond*, p. 368.

The opinion of Carson on these preliminaries is more than suggested in a note of the 5th August, 1914, to Miss Frewen at Charlton Musgrove in Somerset:

"I had no time to write to you to-day, and it is now 10.30 so I only send you a line. I am very much depressed as I fear the Government mean, if they can, to betray us, and pass the Home Rule Bill over our heads and whilst it is impossible to resist in Ulster owing to the difficulties caused by the present situation. They are such a lot of scoundrels I believe they are quite capable of anything. If it is possible I go to-morrow, Thursday night, to Belfast, but I may be detained here. . . . Everything is topsy turvy and I advise you staying in the country for the present at all events. . . .

"My love is always yours,

"EDWARD."

So began again the tug-of-war between these two men, pulling at the two arms of the Prime Minister. Asquith, replying the next day, assured Redmond that his intention to see the Bill on the Statute Book that session was "absolutely unchanged"; but that, as to prorogue at that moment "would in all the circumstances be widely regarded as a piece of sharp practice," he suggested a "very short adjournment," and trusted that "you will be content with my assurances."

So far from being "content," Redmond replied the same day with two indignant protests against any such course, and wrote also to Birrell: "Unless I am able to announce to the Party that the Prime Minister will give a definite pledge about prorogation, it will be impossible to prevent a debate which will, I fear, be very disastrous in its consequences."<sup>1</sup>

In the meantime Carson was working desperately to reconcile his loyalty with the interests of his friends in the North and in the South. He had believed, or at any rate he had hoped, with Craig, that "surely the country would read between the lines and store up that much to our credit when the issue is finally fought out"; but had reason to fear a fatal mischief to the Unionist cause under cover of the war. When the Southern

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 364.

Unionists showed a tendency to join up with Redmond and his Irish Volunteers, Carson warned them that the issue of Home Rule was still open - and in due course they were to learn what loyalty was to be expected of a body secretly controlled by the Irish Republican Brotherhood.

John MacNeill, who at that time was Chairman of the Provisional Committee of the Irish Volunteers, was, like Redmond, using the Movement to bring about a union between the North and the South. On the 6th August he wrote to Carson asking for an interview "in order to follow up our offer of cordial co-operation with the Ulster Volunteers during the present grave emergency," and proposed a meeting also between Colonel Moore and Sir George Richardson, to concert measures "in the event of a foreign invasion of Ireland," and to deal with "questions affecting the preservation of public order."

Carson could not be in Belfast to keep such an appointment even if he had so desired, nor were the Ulster Volunteers in any mood for such co-operation. What concerned them was their own fate. There was a disposition, as Captain Hall reported to Carson, to "place their hearths and homes first, while at the same time the Imperial spirit is strong in them." The Reservists had gone; some of their young men had been recruited; but the bulk of the Force remained—the best trained and equipped body of men outside the Regular Army in the United Kingdom.

What were they to do? They waited for their "Sir Edward" to tell them. Even the carters and farmers, whose horses were requisitioned by the Army, looked to their leader for advice.

"DEAR SIR," one of them wrote to the Army Purchasing Officer, "Until Sir Edward Carson is satisfied that H.M. Government will not play any more tricks over the Home Rule Bill, I cannot let my horses go. Otherwise, of course, I facilitate you.

"JOHN MCCALLOUGH."

One of Carson's main objects was to bring the Force into the war, not as scattered recruits but as a fighting unit. On the 6th August the Secretary of the Ulster Unionist Council stated, on the authority of Sir George Richardson, that "Sir Edward

Carson is at present in consultation with the War Office as to how the Ulster Volunteer Force can be used at present in the interests of the Empire," which gives us the approximate date of a noteworthy interview.

Lord Kitchener was inclined at first to take a hectoring tone with Carson, whom no doubt he mistook for just one more of those troublesome politicians with whom he was condemned to deal.

"Surely," he said, "you are not going to hold out for Tyrone and Fermanagh!"

"You are a damned clever fellow," said Carson, "telling me what I ought to be doing."

"If I had been on a platform with you and Redmond," Kitchener retorted, "I should have knocked your heads together!"

"I'd like to see ye try," said Carson in his slow drawling way, but with such a look as made Kitchener instantly change his tone.

After these unpromising preliminaries the interview went smoothly. Carson remarked that he and Craig (who was with him) had done their duty, as they saw it, to the Empire. They had created a force which might be of service at that juncture; but they would take it as a kindness if, as far as possible, the Ulstermen were kept together for war service.

Kitchener cordially agreed: the Ulster Volunteers were welcome to fight under their own denomination and in their own units. Up till then, he remarked, the name of Ulster had not appeared in the War Office List, although the North of Ireland Horse and the Royal Irish Rifles were recruited in the Province. But by all means let them keep the names of their Volunteer Battalions and let them wear the Red Hand of Ulster in their caps.

These three strong men—Carson, Craig, and Kitchener—parted good friends with the main lines settled; but the political trouble remained.

On Friday, the 7th August, the Lord Mayor of Belfast held a great meeting to organise the loyal service of that city, at which Carson should have been present. He wrote instead that he had to stay in London, "having regard to political questions still



unsettled" which might "involve considerations for Ulster of far-reaching importance, and I am bound to be at my post." "Our loyalty," he reminded the Lord Mayor, "was of no recent date, but the very foundation and groundwork of our political action."

And he went on:

"We will now be prepared to show once more, without any bartering for conditions, that the cause of Great Britain is our cause. . . . We shall, I am sure, be prepared at any cost to offer, as we have already offered, our splendid force for loyal service to our King and country in the certain hope that God will defend the right."

That there was need for these exhortations appears in a letter of 10th August to Carson from Alexander McDowell. "The view," the Belfast solicitor wrote, "was pretty widespread that the Volunteer Force should only offer their services as the result of a bargain," and he was glad that Carson agreed it was a wrong one. The recruiting had been done indiscreetly; the Volunteers were in a haze; but if Home Rule were hung up till the end of the war, and Carson offered Kitchener 20,000 men for foreign service, "and you came here and stated what you had offered, there would be no difficulty in getting at once that number and I think probably more."

It is interesting to remember that a few days before Redmond had impressed John MacNeill and Colonel Moore with his view that to hold up the Reservists would be fatal to the cause of Home Rule. Redmond also had his interview with Kitchener, who received without enthusiasm the offer to guard the coast of Ireland, which he took to be in no danger. "Get me five thousand men and I will say 'thank you,'" he told Redmond; "get me ten thousand and I will take off my hat to you."

Redmond turned impatiently from the War Minister to the Government and pressed them on two points--to supply his volunteers with "some arms and some drill instructors" for the Volunteers and to place the Home Rule Bill on the Statute Book. Between these two fires the Prime Minister worked as usual for compromise or for delay. "A long and rather critical Cabinet this morning," he noted in his Diary, the 10th August;

<sup>1</sup> Stephen Gwynn, *Mr. Redmond's Last Years*, p. 189.

"Redmond was pressing for prorogation and immediate placing on the Statute Book. Carson sent a rather threatening letter in the opposite sense."

The "rather threatening letter," dated 10th August, was written from Mr. Bonar Law's house in Kensington. Here it is:

"DEAR MR. ASQUITH,—Captain Craig has just returned from Belfast with the worst possible news. I sent to the Belfast papers the resolution passed on the 30th July by the Ulster Unionist members which was shown to you by Mr. Bonar Law. It is as follows:

" 'That in view of the grave situation in European politics, we approve of the proposal of Sir Edward Carson that, on behalf of the Irish Unionist Party, he should agree to the adjournment of the debate on the Amending Bill until such date as the Government and the Leaders of the Opposition may, in the interests of the United Kingdom and the Empire, determine.' "

"Now that it is believed that the Home Rule controversy is to be revived, the indignation in Ulster is extreme. They think they have been betrayed, and I am placed in the position that I must either resign the leadership of Ulster or go over to Belfast and throw in my lot with my people there in any action they may feel bound to take, however distasteful it might be to me and however much it might be disliked in England.

"All this difficulty could be avoided by simply postponing the controversy, and if it were postponed Captain Craig informs me that he is in a position to offer Kitchener at once 2 Divisions of trained men (about 20,000) with all their equipment for immediate active service abroad; and in addition a similar number for home service in Ulster. If the controversy goes on of course none of these men will be available, much to my regret.

"Yours etc.,

"EDWARD CARSON."

"We had a very animated debate" (in the Cabinet), Asquith goes on; "and for a time it seemed as though we should come

to a deadlock." "Happily, not for the first, or perhaps the last, time, I was able to devise a form of saving words which pleased everybody, and which I have just (5.15) read to the House with the benediction of Bonar Law and not a single question from anybody."

The "form of saving words," on which Mr. Asquith thus congratulated himself, proposed an adjournment until the 25th August in which interval the Government hoped to make proposals which might meet with "something like general acquiescence."

The hope was vain: between two such opposites there could be no general acquiescence. On 20th August, Craig wrote desperately to Carson, offering to come over.

"In the meantime till the Government either approach you or Asquith betrays us openly in the House the only policy is absolute silence. No offer of assistance would be backed up here till the people know their fate. . . .

"I see clearly that, however much we curse and damn the P.M. in the House, we must say all the same, that we will do our best under the circumstances for the Army and the country; then come over here and face the music, and do our best."

The dilemma for loyal Ulster is put with less anger and more pathos by a Loyalist, who wrote from Dungannon, County Tyrone, on the 18th August:

"DEAR SIR EDWARD,—We decided to-day at our meeting to hold all we can back till 26th when we should know yea or nay, but, Home Rule won or lost, we must go in then for King and Country. I go myself with my men. . . . We've done our best for the best of leaders. . . . I do hope and pray he will not find at the last hour our action will hurt him or in any way injure the cause he has fought as none other could through the last two awful years. . . . We must accept the invitation and come out for our King.

"Believe me, yours very faithfully,

"R. STEVENSON."

"Some of the Omagh men will go in spite of us on Thursday and Ricardo told me to-day he got 40 yesterday from

Belfast and also this morning 12 Nationalist (Fermanagh) Volunteers marched in under an officer and enlisted.—R. S.”

Such was the struggle going on in the heart of Ulster, and in the heart of Carson.

On the 19th August Birrell sent to Redmond a programme of three possible policies which were to be discussed between the Irish Nationalist and the Prime Minister. The letter brought Redmond to London and on 21st August Mr. Asquith's Diary records: “the old bother about Tyrone and those infernal snippets of Fermanagh and Derry . . . Redmond does not see how he and Carson can be brought nearer than they were at Buckingham Palace three weeks ago. . . .”

On the 22nd August Redmond sent to Asquith a long memorandum bidding him defy Carson, pass Home Rule and so win Irish loyalty and Irish-American friendship. If Carson raised “an unpleasant scene,” there would be “a revulsion of feeling against him, not merely on the Liberal but on the Tory benches.” “The entrance,” he argued, “of such strong Unionist peers as Lord Desborough, Lord Arran, Lord Powerscourt and several of the like kind, and of Protestant landlords hitherto convinced Unionists,” into the Irish Volunteers was proof of a growing revolt against the policy of Ulster. There was another argument which Redmond did not state, but which was well understood between those two parties: enthusiastic as he had become for the Allied cause, the Irish leader would or could do nothing for recruitment until Home Rule was on the Statute Book.

On 31st August the patience of the Ministerial Job was almost exhausted. After asking the House of Commons for a further adjournment of ten days, Asquith, in his Diary, makes complaint of a “lot of trouble” with the Irish on both sides. “I sometimes wish,” he exclaims, “we could submerge the whole lot of them and their island for, say, ten years, under the waves of the Atlantic !”

Redmond had just told the Prime Minister, in the House of Commons, and publicly, that “any proposal which would have the effect of depriving us of the enactment of the Irish measure . . . would do infinite mischief and would be warmly resented by us.”

Carson had said nothing; but we may suppose that his mind was already made up. He would, as Craig advised, "face the music" in Ulster. A few days before (on 24th August) his friend Joseph Fisher<sup>1</sup> had written to him:

"French and British are being rolled back in Belgium, and even if the morning's news be better than to-day's, it will still be clear that there is a supreme crisis for the Empire and for Europe. . . . If you have made terms, territorial or temporal, well and good: if you have secured none, it may mean that we shall have to fight for Ulster again when the war is over. But I entreat you, terms or no terms, to rise to the occasion, and to declare before all Europe to-morrow that every drilled Ulster Volunteer is a soldier of the Empire and is ready and willing to obey Lord Kitchener's orders at a day's notice."

Carson did not need these exhortations: as he had said to Kitchener some time before, he knew his duty—knew also the importance of the Act of Union to the safety of the United Kingdom. A reverse in the field of Flanders could, as he knew from history, be retrieved; but to divide a united country under separate governments involved a deeper and more permanent danger. How he felt it is suggested by Lord Beaverbrook in an anecdote told without comprehension of the issues at stake. Carson, coming out of Bonar Law's room, was intercepted by someone who deduced from his "ghastly countenance" that something dreadful had happened at the Front.

"For heaven's sake," the observer exclaimed, "tell me what has happened! What is the news?"

"The very worst possible, my dear fellow. The very worst."

"But what has happened? Is the news very bad?"

"Bad?"—in a tone of tragic solemnity. "The very worst. Asquith has decided to put the Bill on the Statute Book."

Carson bowed, nevertheless, to a Fate that was stronger than Carson. Before the end of the month he must have been resolved to "face the music," and let Union go, for on the 28th August his friend Walter Long wrote to him: "MY DEAR NED,—Some things are easier written than said and I just want to tell you how much I feel for you in the cruel fate which has overtaken

<sup>1</sup> Ulsterman, journalist and barrister, at one time Editor of *Northern Whig*.

you . . . by no fault of your own, you are compelled to see your hopes dashed to the ground."

On that same day, the 28th August, Mr. Birrell reported to Redmond that Lord Roberts had "conveyed to Kitchener an *unconditional* offer from Carson to put *all* his Ulster Volunteers at his disposal for drilling purposes . . . with some sort of assurance that 35,000 of them are willing, if accepted, to enlist and go abroad."

And now to "face the music." On 3rd September in Belfast Carson presided over a meeting of the Ulster Unionist Council which "cordially approved the arrangements made by our leaders with the War Office for active service abroad of one or more Ulster divisions and urged all Loyalists who owe allegiance to our cause and who are qualified to enlist at once for service in such divisions."

The speech which he made upon that resolution was in some respects his greatest. He had been told beforehand by gloomy prophets that he would not get a cheer, or a recruit, or even "God save the King," because of the way the Government had treated them. "We do not seek," said Carson, "to purchase terms by selling our patriotism." "England's difficulty," he went on, "is not Ulster's opportunity: England's difficulty is our difficulty. England's sorrows have always been and always will be our sorrows."

They had kept the truce; they had struggled for 'no mean party advantage: "However we are treated and however others act, let us act rightly. If we are betrayed while we are acting loyally to our country, the infamy will not be ours." As for Home Rule: "We stand where we have always been. It will never be law in our community."

Then he spoke of his anxiety "difficult to measure" since the war had broken out, of the difficulty in switching off men's minds from what had occupied them for the past three years, and of his faith, "from the first moment, that Ulster would give all possible assistance to the United Kingdom in the waging of the war."

He spoke of the Volunteers, whom he had watched from their infancy, who had given him "the confidence and assurance of victory," who had trusted him as he had trusted them, and to whom he said, "Go and help to save your country and to save

your Empire. . . . Go and win honour for Ulster and for Ireland." He described the terms he had made for them with the Secretary of State for War, that they should serve together in a Division of their own. " . . . And so I say to men as far as they have confidence and trust in me, to go and do their duty to the country and we will take care of politics hereafter." As to their anxiety for their people and their home he reassured them: " We are quite strong enough," he said, " to take care of ourselves even after the men who come within the limits of enlistment have all enlisted."

That same night Carson wrote (from the Ulster Club, Belfast) to Miss Frewen: " I sent you a wire to-day, after our meeting. It was a wonderful success and now I am in great hopes we will get our men in large numbers. The promise of making them into a division has been a great help. . . . I feel a great emotion at the way the people here trust me and look to me for advice. . . ."

The result of the appeal was all that Carson hoped. Hitherto recruits had joined the colours in a trickle; thereupon they enlisted in battalions. Next day Sir Edward Carson and James Craig inspected eight hundred men of the North Belfast Regiment, five hundred of whom belonged to the Special Service Section—the *corps d'élite* of the Force. " God bless you," said Carson. " May you come back filled with honour and victory." Whereupon they gave three cheers for the King and marched in a body to enlist at the Old Town Hall. The day after the North Belfasts furnished another contingent; the East, South and West Belfast Regiments and the Young Citizen Volunteers followed suit. Before a month was out Belfast had recruited nearly eight thousand men, and the Loyalist districts of Ulster over twenty thousand more. Carson and Craig had abundantly made good their promise to Kitchener: they and their friends not only raised but helped to equip a complete division—and in record time.

There was one thing, however, which Ulster would not do. On the 26th of August Lord Kitchener had written to Craig:

" The Belgian Army is in want of arms and ammunition. If you can supply their necessities, you will be doing good to our comrades who are fighting the Germans so bravely.

" I have the utmost confidence that you will do your best to meet their wishes and demands."

When a Belgian Mission went over to Belfast to support this appeal, it was hospitably received, and was informed of the circumstances in which the rifles might be required for the defence of Ulster. Now if the Mission could persuade the British Government to cancel Home Rule or exclude Ulster from its operation, much might be done. Otherwise . . .

The Mission sorrowfully admitted the logic of the case, and Mrs. Craig minuted the envelope containing the correspondence, "James refused to part with one rifle."

Were they justified in their wariness? On 8th September Mr. Birrell told Mr. Redmond that the Cabinet had decided to place the Bill on the Statute Book "at once," with the proviso of a short Measure postponing the operation of the Act, and calculated that the Opposition would protest but would not divide. "Carson," said the Chief Secretary, "by his very astute speech to the British gallery, appears to me to be leading up to a *mock heroic*, almost tearful, denunciation of us all as a set of lying unpatriotic curs hardly worth quarrelling with, who may be left to go on their own dishonest way, and when the war is over Ulster will once again be found ready to exclude Home Rule by force from her boundaries. Bonar Law and A. Chamberlain will, I doubt not, follow suit."<sup>1</sup>

So it happened. On the 15th September the Prime Minister announced his terms. Home Rule was to become law, but to remain by virtue of a supplementary Bill in a state of suspended animation until after the war; Mr. Asquith pledged himself that, the coercion of Ulster being "an absolutely unthinkable thing," the Act would not come into operation until Parliament had the fullest opportunity, by an Amending Bill, of altering, modifying or qualifying its provisions in such a way as to secure the general consent both of Ireland and the United Kingdom.

Sir Edward Carson said nothing in reply: but Mr. Bonar Law, who said that he spoke for him, repeated the words that Carson had used: if Ulster were treated forty times worse than they are being treated he would still go to them and say, "at such a time it is your duty to go forth and help your country." Mr. Bonar Law, in his grating manner, accused the Prime Minister of a breach of faith with the Opposition: and accused Redmond of

<sup>1</sup> Denis Gwynn, *ibid.*, p. 879.



exacting terms by a "conditional loyalty." Having promised, nevertheless, to support the Government in the conduct of the war, Mr. Bonar Law marched out of the House at the head of the Unionist Party.

Thus ended at that time the great controversy over the ill-omened Third Home Rule Bill. Mr. Asquith had requested Birrell to request Redmond that there should be "no crowing over the victory";<sup>1</sup> but it was in fact no victory either for Redmond or Carson. In this judgment of Solomon the baby was to be dismembered; both were left with ghastly fragments of that for which they had fought. Redmond had won the South and Carson the North; Redmond had lost a United Ireland and Carson had lost a United Kingdom. It was a bitter day for both these Irishmen; nor could it have been a happy day for the Englishman who had suffered so much between them.

<sup>1</sup> Denis Gwynn, *ibid.*, p. 380.

## CHAPTER III

### *More about Recruiting*

Marriage - Walter Long complains - The Ulster Division - Recruiting speeches - Redmond in the south - Ominous words.

SIR EDWARD CARSON, loser and victor, drew himself out of that last ordeal in Ulster more dead than alive. "Here I am stuck in bed for another day" (he wrote to Miss Frewen from Eaton Place) "with that horrid pain in my side. . . . I am becoming a chronic invalid! And, of course, it is the result of all the worry I have gone through." A strange letter on the eve of marriage, yet characteristic. Carson, as his friends well knew, would be plunged in hopeless gloom in the morning and yet be his old fighting self by midday.

Then he turned from his own troubles to those of a lady of their acquaintance, "who being German is of course very unhappy, as she cannot hear from her people in Berlin, and, in addition, I suppose, hears nothing but abuse of Germany." "Do not believe" (he went on) "all you read about atrocities. The same kind of things are appearing about us in the German and American papers. Our Press make a great mistake in reporting victories which are not real and make the people take a less serious view of the situation than the true one. The fact is that it will take all our patience and sacrifice to pull through this awful war and before long people will have to make great sacrifices and changes. . . . I have to meet B. Law and a General Cowan on Monday so perhaps you will not come up till Tuesday. I would hate you to be lonely on Monday evening."

On September 17th, 1914, these two dear friends and strangely assorted lovers, Edward Carson and Ruby Frewen, were married at Charlton Musgrove in Somerset. Thenceforth a serene presence ruled Carson's home and made it a secure refuge from the weariness and vexation of life. His desire, more than ever, was to leave the bitter field of politics and divide his time between law

and home; but two things kept him in Parliament—the war and Ireland.

Carson took his bride at once to Ulster to make her known to his friends. On the 28th September—"Covenant Day"—they were in Belfast. Carson addressed a great meeting in the Ulster Hall, exhorting the young men to join the colours, assuring the people that their cause would not be weakened by their sacrifice. That night Mr. Bonar Law renewed the "Blenheim pledge"—"without any condition," and Carson exhorted them again to sink everything in their duty to King and country: "I believe as firmly as I can believe anything that in the successful prosecution of the war we will have solved also the Ulster question."

Carson had his personal anxiety, which came out in a dramatic turn of his speech. "Let me say a word for the Navy," he was saying, when someone exclaimed, "You have a son there, Sir Edward." "Yes, and in the Army also," he continued. He had two sons at the front; many of his dearest friends and relatives were also fighting: in his situation and anxieties he was typical of the community to which he belonged—the Loyalists of Ireland; and he burned with their ardour, unaltered though their world might fall. "No, my Lord Mayor, notwithstanding the Bill, or if there were forty of them, they will never get us to alter our loyalty to our King. They may purchase loyalty for other people. Ours is born and bred in us."

The British Government had entered the struggle not only divided and therefore infirm in mind, but ill-prepared and ill-equipped. Distrusting and even despising military force, they had cut down all warlike stores and reserves to the point of danger, and had carried the spirit of compromise into the conduct of war. Misunderstanding the spirit of the British nation, they sought to cajole and to bribe where they might have commanded, and in the interests of trade and of policy would have done their enemy as little instead of as much hurt as possible. The Germans were influenced by no such considerations; they were well prepared; they had made war their science, almost their religion; they hit and they hit hard. Under these swift and unexpected blows, the Liberal administration floundered helplessly, never facing the situation; but clinging to their political

concepts, and turning desperately from one expedient to another.

As things went from bad to worse, the Conservative Opposition, which had more of the instinct for war, began to repent of its ready acquiescence in the party truce. On the 21st of October, 1914, Walter Long wrote to Carson:

"Many thanks for your letter. I agree *in part* that criticism, certainly attack, at this moment is, if possible, to be avoided; but on the other hand I don't feel satisfied that we can sit silent when manifest and easily remedied blunders are being committed broadcast. . . . During the Boer War the other side not only criticised our policy in going to war; but violently attacked us on the way we conducted it. We now are silent. . . . I, for one, am not prepared to sit down and see our men sacrificed when things could easily be put right if the truth were known. I shall of course do nothing in a hurry, nor shall I, if I can help it, act contrary to the views of my colleagues."

How these discontents were to work out, we shall presently see. For the time Carson refused to be drawn. We may suppose that he was more interested in a letter from James Craig, by that time Lieutenant-Colonel, and A.A. and Q.M.G. on the staff of Major-General Powell, who commanded the 86th (Ulster) Division.

On the 14th November, 1914, Craig wrote to Carson from Belfast, how Mrs. Clarke of Donacloney, by Lurgan in County Armagh, had sent us "five very fine young men" although she would "suffer through losing them, especially in the winter" and "wished she had five more, to give to the King," and how Craig was addressing nine meetings, night after night, in County Down—"not that there has been any slackness in the County: the other Battalion is the strongest in the division (over 1,800) and it is impossible to say how many have otherwise joined the colours"—but there were some left and "with the object of getting at them I would like a special message from you."

When Carson came over, he would see "a very great improvement as every man is more fully clothed with a warm military coat, and there is nothing standing between us and the front except artillery and equipment. The latter we are busy

manufacturing locally." The War Office had "played the game splendidly all through." Major-General Friend (at that time commanding in Ireland) had "over and over again gone out of his way to help." The Staff, which included Spender, were "all men after your own heart—keen, full of the Ulster spirit, and one and all working like niggers to make the Division a pattern one."

Carson was to go over to Ulster at the beginning of the year to hearten the recruits and help in the recruiting. On the 1st January, 1915, we find General Powell writing to him on Divisional matters "about which we conferred recently at your house." Lord Kitchener had been very insistent on raising artillery from the Ulstermen; Carson had told him it could not easily be done; but they were going to do their "level best"; Sir George Richardson was helping with drafts, on the basis of a scheme he had just formed; but "as everyone looks to you as being the most powerful means of squeezing men out of Ulster, and as I know that your whole thought is for the success of this Division, I do hope you will find it possible to spare some of your valuable time to speak in important centres in the province of Ulster."

Thus Carson was caught up in the recruiting campaign and worked with a will. On the 5th of January, 1915, he arrived in Belfast again, accompanied by Lady Carson, "whose presence in our midst" (said the *Belfast News Letter*) "will give intense satisfaction." He introduced his wife to one of his meetings—"as good an Ulsterman and as good a Unionist and as good a Protestant as I am." Thenceforth, like their "Sir Edward," she belonged to them.

Regimental parades, the opening of hospitals, visits to the Divisional camps, in which by that time there were some seventeen thousand men in training—such activities occupied the visitors. Carson had gone to Hartlepool a few days before, and had seen the dreadful havoc done in twenty minutes by German naval guns firing out of the fog: "I saw the little children with their legs cut off and their chests cut open," he said at Bangor. "Let us not be too confident that such things will not happen upon our own coast." But even in the heat of war, a characteristic magnanimity shone in these speeches. "Recollect," he



SIR EDWARD CARSON ATTENDS PEACE CELEBRATIONS IN BELFAST

said at Crawfordsburn, "you have to fight against a very brave and a very skilful foe. . . . They are great soldiers, greatly prepared, greatly enthusiastic in the belief that their cause is right, just as we know our cause is right. That is the enemy you have to meet. And the lesson you have to learn from it is the one word 'efficiency' so that you may meet them on equal or even superior ground."

His faith never wavered: "Some nations," he said at Bangor, "must go down in this war. We are not going down. . . . I never yet knew when I was beaten—even when it was in the Law Courts, and I never yet knew an Ulsterman who admitted he was beaten." We find touches of the old sardonic humour in these speeches: "There seems to be more joy," he said, "in political circles of a particular character over one Nationalist that enlisted than over a whole Ulster Division." And again: "I was told over and over again that I had started regiments of rebels. . . . I always boasted that I was the chief rebel myself, if it was to be a rebel to love my country and to maintain what I inherited of freedom. . . . Yes, we have got 17,000 rebels in camp now. God bless the rebels!"

Then he spoke in his simple direct way of what was at stake: "I tell you, having spoken to many of those men who have been round the battlefields from the retreat at Mons up to the Aisne and the trenches at Ypres, there have been days when our lines have been so thin that it was an almost impossible task; except for the courage and the grit of the men that we have there we might have had overwhelming disaster. Yes, they have given us breathing time. How are we taking advantage of it? To-day we may be able to do something; to-morrow the time may have passed."

He spoke of the Division with pride: "We are not a harum-scarum lot of people gathered from here, there and everywhere. No, we are all brothers. They are our own Volunteers; they are men of our own religion. They are men of our own way of thinking; they are men of the great Ulster tradition."

There was nothing quite like it elsewhere in the United Kingdom: Carson commanded and they went. By the end of February 1915, the six counties of the north-east corner had contributed 80,000 recruits out of 82,000 furnished by the whole

Province. Belfast, although she had large Admiralty orders to execute, raised 18,600 of these—at a rate of 465 per 10,000 of the population: such industrial towns of Antrim and Down as Lurgan and Lisburn did even better with 700 per 10,000. "When it is remembered," said the *Morning Post*, "that Ulster labours under a very heavy sense of grievance and wrong, this response deserves the highest praise of all Englishmen of whatsoever party." When the authorities complained that "recruiting is particularly bad in Ireland, despite the efforts which Sir Edward Carson and Mr. Redmond have made to promote it, each in his own sphere," Carson replied with the Ulster figures, which, as he said, were "unequalled by any other district in the United Kingdom."<sup>1</sup>

While Carson was thus busy in the North, John Redmond was working with no less devotion, if with less success, in the South. On the day when the Clerk of the Crown cried "*Le Roy le veult*" over the Third Home Rule Act, he issued an eloquent appeal to the people of Ireland on behalf of his Party. They had received their "Charter of Liberty"; the democracy of Great Britain had kept faith with Ireland; it was the duty of Ireland to keep faith with them. They were fighting for the sacred rights and liberties of small nations; they must furnish their quota, form an Irish Brigade, and put the Volunteers in a state to defend the country: "In this way by the time the war ends Ireland will possess an Army of which she may be proud," and he appealed to his countrymen of a different creed and opposite political opinions to go into the fight side by side, so that their blood may be the seal that will bring all Ireland together in one nation, and in liberties equal and common to all."

It was a circumstance both ironical and Irish that while Carson recruited in the North to prove the case for the Union, Redmond recruited in the South to establish Home Rule.

Redmond, like Carson, went over to Ireland "to face the music." His first appeal, to a parade of Irish Volunteers, produced an immediate crisis in that body. On the 24th September, 1914, twenty out of the twenty-seven members of the original Committee issued a manifesto repudiating Redmond, and declaring that he was "no longer entitled, through his nominees,

<sup>1</sup> See *Morning Post*, October 1st, 1914, and March 22nd, 1915.



to any place in the administration and guidance of the Irish Volunteer Organisation." A sharp conflict followed, in which the force divided, the great majority going with Redmond, but a formidable, well armed and active minority remaining with Sinn Fein.<sup>1</sup>

Despite this victory, things did not go well with Redmond's recruiting campaign. He had begun rather late: the great Irish regiments of the South had already drawn out their Reservists and the cream of the recruits. Fighting in Southern Ireland had been, time out of mind, a hereditary profession: the officers came chiefly from the Loyal and Protestant minority; the men, although chiefly Catholic, were almost a class by themselves; some descended from the old race of swordsmen were wholly attached to their regiments generation after generation; others were recruited from the street-corners and transformed into professional soldiers. There was little love lost between such people, and the small farmers, publicans and gombeen men of the Irish Nationalist Party; among Redmond's followers the prejudice against the Army was both social and political.

Thus Redmond found it difficult to get recruits from his own party, and his enemies were busy among those from whom recruits might have been drawn. In Dublin the *Irish Worker* denounced his volunteers as "scabs" and Redmond himself as "a disgraced and discovered modern Castlereagh." Public meetings were held praising the Germans and vilifying the British Army. Jim Larkin and his transport workers had formed a sort of revolutionary army which paraded Dublin in uniform and terrorised the citizens.

While these roughs, armed with rifles and bayonets, conducted their anti-recruiting demonstrations, the police stood by under orders not to interfere, and when Mr. Asquith went over to help John Redmond the approaches to the hall of meeting were as strongly guarded as if in a hostile city. "Our recruiting," said Carson sardonically, "is not done behind barbed wire."

For these and other reasons Redmond's recruiting campaign did not prosper, and he and John Dillon soon fell into debate with Lord Kitchener. The War Office was accused of drafting

<sup>1</sup> Denis Gwynn, *Life of John Redmond*, p. 392.

men from the Irish Division into other formations, and of opposing hopeful designs to form an Irish Army with its own badge and uniform. The General Staff, which had its own information, neither liked nor trusted the Nationalist Volunteers, who on their side refused to come under control of the War Office. Their official organ, the *National Volunteer*, demanded that "Irish freedom shall come now, and at once: the National Volunteers are enrolled to make that mandate effective." "What Mr. Redmond wants," said an organ of the North, "is that the Government shall train them, arm them, and place them in charge of all the points of strategic importance in Ireland, but leave them entirely under his control." And the same newspaper pointed out that whereas up to the 20th March, 50,000 recruits had joined the Army, 35,000 were from Ulster and 15,000 from the other Provinces.<sup>1</sup>

The comparison was not altogether fair, since Southern Ireland had already provided some of the finest regiments in the British Army; but it was true as far as the Irish Nationalists were concerned. That party could not and would not change; its leader's exhortations to recruit only undermined its power.

Whether he liked it or not Redmond had to take his share in other activities which boded ill for the peace of his country. On Sunday the 4th of April, 1915, under the Parnell statue, he held a great review of the Nationalist Force. Twenty-five thousand armed and partly armed men, in green uniforms, the cohorts of the United Irish League, the Ancient Order of Hibernians, the Gaelic Athletic Association and the Nationalist Volunteers, marched past, an unruly and ill-disciplined crowd, and for that reason the more formidable. "Strong, healthy, young men they looked," a Loyalist reported; "but apparently they are content to play at being soldiers—at least for the present. Their time is coming later." Ominous words!

<sup>1</sup> *Belfast News Letter*, 5th April, 1915.

## CHAPTER IV

### *Attorney-General*

War politics - Drink and munitions - Lord Fisher resigns - The Coalition - Carson joins - Redmond protests - The case of Campbell.

CARSON, as much as any, felt the generous impulses which in war, as in adversity, bring men together. "As they grasped each other's hand," he said in one of his speeches at that time, "they felt there was a kind of electricity between them, and each man tried to do his best for his neighbour." Under that influence, party-men obliterated their divisions, and the Conservatives, thinking their occupation gone, diverted their organisation to the work of recruiting for the Army. Of the Party no less than 139 left the House of Commons for a more active service in the field, and as upon the other side 41 Liberals, one Socialist and three Nationalist Members joined the colours, the balance of forces in Parliament was, for the time being, destroyed. Any idea of a General Election, for which the Conservatives had been so desperately agitating, was clean out of mind, and even by-elections went uncontested.

The Government, at first with surprise and then with complacency, found itself at the head of a united and enthusiastic nation, with nothing to fear either in Parliament or in the country. This unanimity was only a little damped when it passed the two contentious measures of Home Rule and Welsh Disestablishment and began to toy with a Plural Voting Bill. Not so much these trespasses on the party truce as the heavy strokes of defeat made the Opposition restive. The escape of the *Goeben*; the sinking of the *Hogue*, the *Cressy* and the *Aboukir*; the expedition to Antwerp and the loss of the Naval Brigade; reverses in East Africa; the destruction of Cradock; the raids on Yarmouth and the Hartlepoons; ill-success in France and Flanders; the lack of war-like stores and munitions, and above all the entanglement of the Dardanelles—such things forced

new political issues. The Germans were taking the place of the Conservatives as a more searching and a more damaging Opposition.

We have already heard Walter Long complaining to this effect in the reluctant ear of Carson; a little later we find the Wiltshire squire joining Lord Curzon in wrathful representations to Mr. Bonar Law. The Government, as Lord Curzon was ready to demonstrate, had all the advantages while the Conservatives had all the drawbacks of a coalition. "They tell us," Lord Curzon proceeded to argue, "nothing or next to nothing of their plans, and yet they pretend our Leaders share both their knowledge and their responsibility. If we ask perfectly legitimate questions, we are treated as though we were naughty children, to be snubbed even by Lord Luenas."

It was particularly bitter to Lord Curzon to find a late military opponent in India his superior in the House of Lords. "The Secretary of State for War," he protested, "reads us exiguous memoranda of platitudes known to everybody; interpolates a curt affirmative or negative to the solitary speech to which he deigns to listen, then marches out and leaves the rest of the debate to colleagues who either affect to know nothing or screen their silence behind his authority."

And in sum:

"We are ready enough to give the Government our support: but it can only be if they give us their confidence, and if they refrain from taking advantage of our patriotism."

The reply of Mr. Bonar Law to these representations of his colleagues was deprecatory and despondent. He saw "great difficulties" in any action, although he was ready to join Lord Lansdowne in disclaiming both knowledge and responsibility; if it were true, which he could not believe, about the Plural Voting Bill, "I am not at all sure that we should not openly declare that the truce is at an end."

"I know," he continued, "how unsatisfactory the present position is. . . . We are conducting the most difficult war . . . in regard to which the nation is united; but half the nation distrusts the men who are carrying it on." There were, however, only two alternatives, one to go on as they were going, "without responsibility and with a very limited amount of criticism . . .

or to face a coalition." As he was against the latter, he was driven, on the whole, to content himself with the former.

This letter was written on the 29th January, 1915, and it may be noted that not only Mr. Bonar Law but Lord Curzon and Mr. Walter Long all repudiated any idea of seeking or consenting to a coalition, yet all three, within four months, were to be colleagues of Mr. Asquith.

We see approaches to that event in some curious negotiations with the Chancellor of the Exchequer on the subject of Prohibition. Mr. Lloyd George was by that time concerning himself with munitions, about which his conscience may well have pricked him, since the War Office had to repair the short-sighted parsimony of the Treasury. On 12th October, 1914, he became Chairman of a Munitions Committee of the Cabinet, and was shortly at loggerheads with Lord Kitchener, who had a well-founded trust in his Master of the Ordnance, General von Donop, and stood staunchly by that officer. Foiled in one, the Chancellor of the Exchequer turned in another direction. The engineers, he argued, were unable to repair the deficiency in munitions because of an over-indulgence in liquor. He would start in crusade against another enemy more formidable and more familiar than the Germans, what he called "the Drink."

"His [L. G.'s] mind," Mr. Asquith confided to his Diary, "oscillates from hour to hour between the two poles of absurdity cutting off all drink from the working-man—which would lead to something like a universal strike—or buying out the whole liquor trade of the country and replacing it by a huge State monopoly."

"George asked to see me yesterday about the Drink question," Bonar Law wrote to Carson on the 2nd April, 1915. "He proposes to take over the whole trade, with adequate compensation, and wishes to know what our attitude will be."

Bonar Law added that he had summoned a party meeting to consider the subject; but he did not expect Carson to come back from Torquay (where he then was). Carson did not come up; but it is evident that he disliked the proposal, for when Bonar Law wrote again, enclosing a letter which "we decided yesterday to send to George," there is an indication of difference: "I should like to talk to you about the whole thing," Bonar

wrote, "when you come back; but there is really a great deal to be said in favour of such a scheme if it could be carried out—which I doubt."

The letter enclosed suggested how completely the Conservative Leader had already come under the sway of the Chancellor of the Exchequer:

*"7th April, 1915.*

"DEAR MR. LLOYD GEORGE,—If the information in the possession of the Government causes them to decide that it is necessary for the successful prosecution of the war that the State should take over the production and distribution of alcohol with adequate compensation to the existing interests we shall not as a party oppose the proposal.

"Yours very truly,

"A. BONAR LAW."

Mr. Asquith, as we have seen, was less compliant and Mr. Lloyd George had to content himself with something short of his original programme. On the 17th May, 1915, the Commons debated the Immature Spirits Restriction Bill, upon which (and upon Lloyd George) Carson exercised his sarcasm.

"The Chancellor of the Exchequer says . . . what a terrible thing, before breakfast, to drink this whisky raw. It is a horrible thing! I admit it. No one feels more strongly about it than I do. But it is just as horrible to drink before breakfast a glass of pot-still whisky two years old as to drink a glass of patent-still whisky one year old."

Although it was a nonsensical measure, involving, as he said, "at the very worst time an enormous expense," Carson did not press his protest to a division. There were bigger things to think about. That very day the Leaders of the Conservative Party had taken a step which was to make an end of the Party system and establish a Coalition.

The crisis of May 1915 bears this resemblance to the crisis of the previous August—the decisive stroke came from Lansdowne House and took the form of a letter from Mr. Bonar

Law to the Prime Minister. This time, however, it was to support the hand, not of Asquith against Lloyd George, but of Lloyd George against Asquith.

"Lord Lansdowne and I," the Leader of the Opposition wrote, "have learnt with dismay that Lord Fisher has resigned, and we have come to the conclusion that we cannot allow the House to adjourn until this fact has been made known and discussed."

And he proceeded: "In our opinion things cannot go on as they are, and some change in the constitution of the Government seems to us inevitable if it is to retain a sufficient measure of public confidence to conduct the war to a successful conclusion."

The occasion, then, was the resignation of Lord Fisher from the Admiralty, the apparent cause the adventure of the Dardanelles; but the true motive was a coalition for which Mr. Lloyd George was then working, and the more we look into that crisis, the more we perceive the influence of that restless spirit. It was to Mr. Lloyd George that Lord Fisher went with his resignation; it was Mr. Lloyd George who carried the news to Mr. Asquith; it was to Mr. Lloyd George that Mr. Bonar Law went when he heard of it. According to Lord Riddell (who had it from Lloyd George) Bonar Law (who was, for once, excited) proposed a National Government with Lloyd George as Prime Minister, a proposal which the latter, out of loyalty to Mr. Asquith, declined. It was, however, Lloyd George who reinforced Bonar Law's letter of the 17th with a letter of his own.

After reciting a long list of *ex parte* statements concerning munitions, he proceeded: "If these facts are approximately correct, I hesitate to think what action the public would insist on if they were known . . . I cannot therefore continue to pre-  
side [over the Munitions Committee] under such conditions." It was not merely a resignation, it was a threat.

That letter was written on the 19th May, 1915, and upon that day Mr. Asquith announced in general terms the reconstruction of his Government. Mr. Winston Churchill was the first victim. He had played a courageous and a patriotic part; as he reminded Mr. Bonar Law in a plea for justice: "I had," he said, "to procure the money, the men, the ships and ammunition. Supported

by the Prime Minister I had last year for four continuous months of Cabinet meetings to beat down the formidable attack of the Chancellor of the Exchequer backed by three-fourths of the Cabinet upon the necessary naval estimates." He had, moreover, he said, mobilised the fleet, without legal sanction, and contrary to the Cabinet decision. These things he put to Mr. Bonar Law, as to the arbiter of his fate; but he was thought dangerous in such an office: the decision went against him and he fell.

If the object of Mr. Bonar Law in this transaction was to extricate our forces from the Dardanelles his moves suggest an infirmity of purpose. Lord Beaverbrook, in his account of that crisis, tells how his friend accepted an inferior office: "When Bonar Law went out that morning to the meetings with Mr. Asquith and Mr. Lloyd George, he promised his friends that whatever happened he would not give way; he returned to inform them that he had done so." "I am here," he is reported to have said to Mr. Asquith, "to show you how to run a Coalition Government by forbearance and concession." It is the hard experience of life that in affairs of State political leaders do not get their way by the exercise of such qualities. Mr. Balfour went to the Admiralty and the affair at Gallipoli proceeded from one calamity to another.

The reconstruction of the Government occupied the last half of May 1915, "the most hellish fortnight of his life" as Mr. Asquith described it to Birrell. On the 17th January Lord Curzon had written to Mr. Bonar Law: "Like Mr. Long I am entirely against a Coalition Government even if (which I do not at present think in the least likely) it were proposed to us by the other side." Lord Curzon was accommodated in the dignified office of Lord Privy Seal. Mr. Walter Long wrote to Carson on the 25th of May:

"MY DEAR NED,—What on earth is going to happen? Papers announce you are going to join; but I don't believe a word they say. They declare, 'Mr. Long's health won't permit him to join' or 'Mr. Long may be induced to alter his decision' when nobody has asked after my health and what my views are, and I have come to no decision!

"I hate the idea of a coalition. I don't believe it is necessary.



I don't believe it will work when it comes to daily administration; I loathe the very idea of our good fellows sitting with these double-dyed traitors; but of course I shall support our leaders and the Government. I would support the D—I himself as P.M., with a cabinet of his pet angels, if they would adopt compulsion all round and prosecute the war with vigour."

Mr. Walter Long became Minister of Health.

Sir Edward Carson joined the Government (as Attorney-General) with more unfeigned reluctance than any of his colleagues, and among the "many nice and some invidious personal questions" involved in this piece of Cabinet-making his appointment was not the least delicate, for it involved Ireland and Mr. Asquith's relations with the Irish Nationalists.

The Prime Minister approached Redmond with his accustomed suavity. On the night of the 18th of May, one day before the announcement in the House of Commons, Redmond (at Aughavanagh) received an urgent message from the Prime Minister. The Ministry was about to be reconstructed "on a broad national basis." "I am most anxious you should join.... The Opposition are anxious that Carson, whose administrative gifts they value, should be included. Present Chief Secretary will remain in his office and in the Cabinet."<sup>1</sup>

For Redmond there could be no thought of joining: it would have sealed a fate already in hazard. His reply was firmly in the negative, and he had something to say besides by way of comment:

"In view of the fact that it is impossible for me to join," Redmond wrote to Asquith, "I think most strongly that Carson should not be included. From Irish point of view inclusion would do infinite harm and make our efforts to help far more difficult."

Mr. Asquith was importunate; but his entreaties only brought fresh protests. On the 25th of May Redmond wrote to reinforce his objection to Carson: "For the Irish people it will mean installed in power the leader of the Ulster revolters, who, the other day, was threatening hostilities to the forces of the Crown and the decision of Parliament."

<sup>1</sup> See Denis Gwynn, *Life of John Redmond*, chapter xii.

Mr. Birrell was enlisted in support of the Prime Minister. "What will be done about Carson I can't say," the Chief Secretary wrote to Redmond. "Your views are shared by the Liberal Party. He himself is against coming in, but is the Opposition's best man and he may be pressed on the P.M. . . . You cannot imagine how I loathe the idea of sitting cheek by jowl with these fellows. . . ."

But worse was to come. On the 29th May Birrell wrote again explaining that "the winners claimed their share in Ireland on the same kind of terms as elsewhere," and that "it was a little difficult to close the door altogether on their ugly faces." In sum, "Campbell had effected a lodgment as Lord Chancellor."

Now James Campbell was an Irish lawyer whom the Nationalists liked less than they liked Carson, and the storm of letters and telegrams redoubled in fury: "Proposal to appoint Campbell," Redmond telegraphed, "has created intense feeling in Ireland, and would inevitably mean end of political truce . . . and necessitate immediate discussion in House of Commons."

It was in vain Mr. Asquith pointed out that "Viceroy, Chief Secretary, Law Officers," etc., were "all our own men," and that the Lord Chancellor was a "mere judicial officer"; that Campbell was well suited to the post and that his honour was pledged in the matter. The Nationalists would have none of it. On this contemptible issue, as Birrell called it, the Coalition nearly came to grief. The dispute bickered along for months, Campbell writing to Carson, Bonar Law pressing Campbell's claim, Asquith writing to Redmond, Redmond resisting, Asquith trying to find a law lordship, a puisne judgeship in England, anything to satisfy the claimant and placate his enemies, until at last the matter is accommodated by Campbell being made Attorney-General in Ireland.

In such uneasy circumstances, with the centre of trouble still in Ireland, Carson found himself an unwilling member of an Asquith Administration, so true it is that war, like misfortune, makes strange bed-fellows.

## CHAPTER V

### *Military Matters*

Doubts about the Coalition – The Ministry of Munitions – Kitchener's troubles – High explosives – The Dardanelles – Sir Henry Wilson – Compulsory service.

THE Liberal Government, like Proteus, had changed its shape to escape its destiny. Mr. Bonar Law himself afterwards confided to John Redmond that he joined the Coalition as "the only alternative to a General Election which otherwise could not have been prevented." Such an election, he added, "would have resulted in the return of a Tory majority, and after a little bit there would have been an ordinary party opposition in the House of Commons, with effects most disastrous to the country."<sup>1</sup> To have such a chance at such a crisis, and to have fallen back upon such an alternative—it is not easy to imagine either the elder or the younger Pitt coming to so self-mistrustful a decision.

Bonar Law still leaned heavily on the arm of Carson, and "insisted from the first," as a contemporary journalist states, "that Sir Edward, for whom he has a profound friendship and admiration, must join the new Cabinet."<sup>2</sup> One at least of Carson's friends saw the inevitable end of such an arrangement. Mr. R. J. Lynn, of the *Northern Whig*, had written on the 18th May, 1915: "I am greatly perturbed by all these rumours about a Coalition. Such governments have always proved miserable failures in the past and I am convinced a Coalition Government now would be bad for the Empire and disastrous to our cause in Ulster." And he suggested the alternative: "If the Government goes on as it is doing, nothing is surer than that the war will bring about its destruction and that we will get a chance of undoing the harm that has been done." The Conservative Party, however, either took a shorter view or recoiled from such a risk. They hoped that Carson would inspire with

<sup>1</sup> Denis Gwynn, *Life of John Redmond*, pp. 467–8.

<sup>2</sup> *Belfast News Letter*, 26th May, 1915.

something of his own courage and resolution the Government which for that reason pressed him to join.

There were many good wishes. General Richardson sent Carson the hearty congratulations of the Ulster Volunteer Force. "The best point in the new Cabinet," his old friend and school-fellow, Sir William Ridgeway wrote to him, "is the grand factor of your fearless and honest personality." The ladies were no less enthusiastic. "Was it only a year ago," the Duchess of Abercorn wrote, "that you were nearly arrested for treason?" "You ought to be Lord Chancellor!" Lady Londonderry exclaimed, "or anything else! You will surely let me go to tea in old Finlay's rooms! Will you?"

For Carson, probably, the letter most touching of all came from Sir Robert Finlay, Attorney-General in the Balfour Administration, who magnanimously waived a prior claim: "I am delighted at your accession to the Cabinet," he wrote, "as an old friend it is a pleasure to know that the Government will have your help and counsel, and having worked for so many years with you, I have had the best opportunities for realising of what value to the country that help will be. May I add that I admired more than I can tell you the enormous sacrifices you made in the cause of Ulster, and I rejoice that the Unionist Party have taken this opportunity of recognising all you did for the country?"

Carson, indeed, had given up much for Ulster. He always preferred the Law Courts to the House of Commons yet had sacrificed his profession to that cause. "He doubled his fees," a journalist of the time reported, "thinking this would bring respite, but instead of bringing him relief it made him in greater demand than ever." And to give point to his story he went on to tell how, when a heavy brief was brought in marked five hundred guineas, Carson refused it; his clerk came back in a little with the offer of a thousand guineas. "No, I won't take it under fifteen hundred," said Carson to be rid of it; but the figure was immediately accepted and the case went on. It is true that there were rich perquisites to the office of Attorney-General; but Carson, because he had a place in the Cabinet, renounced all opportunities of profit beyond his salary, and sat down grimly to the work of his Department and of the Government.

Mr. Lloyd George, having arranged that Mr. McKenna should keep his place warm at the Treasury, was creating a new office, which the Prime Minister fondly hoped would absorb his energies, and on the 26th May, the Attorney-General had the following letter:

“MY DEAR CARSON,—Will you kindly consider as promptly as may be:

“(1) Whether the new Office of Munitions, which is to carry a salary and perhaps an Under-Secretary, does not require legislation to bring it into existence.

“(2) Whether Lloyd George’s transfer from the Exchequer to the new office vacates his seat?

“Yours very truly,

“H. H. ASQUITH.”

We may suppose that this matter of munitions and the heavy reverses of the time occupied the first Cabinet meeting which Carson attended—it began on May 27th, 1915—and many another thereafter. They, the Liberal Ministers, had all looked to Kitchener to get them out of the Serbonian bog into which their lack of prevision and provision had plunged them. The soldier sat amongst them struck to taciturnity by their facile and ignorant talk. He himself was unfamiliar with many of the problems, which flocked like hungry and clamorous birds about the heads of the Cabinet. Called in at the last moment to conduct a war for which they had neglected to provide, he had put a well-founded trust in General von Donop, Master of the Ordnance. Together these two had made such arrangements as were possible to improvise supplies and had made besides large contracts on both sides of the Atlantic. Kitchener was prepared to await in silence their fruition, unmoved by the impatience of ignorance and the misrepresentations of intrigue. For, as he had the training of the engineer, he knew well that where even the plant was lacking the want could not be supplied in a day nor in a year.

Carson was later to get more than one disturbing glimpse into the doubts and fears which divided the mind of the Secretary of State. There was, already, one circumstance which stung

Kitchener out of his accustomed silence. His old comrade, Sir John French, to justify his reverses in the field, had instigated in the Press an outcry which the Chancellor of the Exchequer had used for his own purposes. In the case which Lord Kitchener laid before his colleagues shortly after the new Government was formed he set forth both the difficulties and achievements of his Office. Despite heavy losses, the Expeditionary Force of 160,000 men had been raised by the end of May 1915 to a strength of 600,000; there were besides 125,000 men in the Dardanelles and a million and a half in training and in garrison at home. The War Office had made good the heavy losses in artillery and rifles, and had besides made or put in order a large number more; in July 1914, 18-lb. shells had been produced at the rate of 8,000 per month; by May 1915 they were making 400,000 a month. In three days of that month they were making as much ammunition as in a whole year of peace.

As to high explosives, the shell was not, as Mr. Lloyd George at first supposed, or represented, merely the casing: it included the filling and the fuse. The French had lost 800 guns, many of their teams and some actions in the field by premature bursts of high explosives. These dangers had to be overcome by experiment before the shell could be manufactured, and even then it was dangerous to divert machinery and trained men from the essential supplies to the new experiment, the more as General Headquarters in France had at first reported against high explosives and declared their preference for shrapnel. Moreover, before the war we had been content to buy the high explosives which we required from Germany, and the Germans had even controlled the means of production in this country. After the war began, we were reduced to buying the plant of a toluol factory which the Germans had established in Rotterdam.

This reasonable defence went for nothing: the new Department added confusion and extravagance to difficulties already formidable, nor was there any compensating gain, save that the public and the Army were comforted by a fallacious appearance of energy. It was many months before the far-seeing arrangements made by Lord Kitchener and General von Donop came to fruition—and then the Minister of Munitions reaped the credit.

Carson would have preferred to devote himself to the work of

a Department which he understood; but he was a member of the Cabinet and was drawn into unfamiliar issues. By a fatal error the Imperial General Staff which should have directed operations over the whole field had been dispersed: its Chief was in command of the Expeditionary Force, and many of his colleagues had gone with him to Flanders. Lord Kitchener as Secretary of State extemporised a strategy to meet the situation; he knew well, as all good soldiers knew, that the decision must be in the West; he worked to provide for that campaign, but his military calculations were upset by the demands of a colleague. He had reluctantly agreed to the adventure of the Dardanelles on the understanding that it was to be a naval operation. When the naval attack failed Kitchener was placed in a cruel dilemma—to lend troops he could ill spare from the West or suffer a reverse to our prestige in the East.

In war, as in life, one false step leads to another. Kitchener, under the pressure of calamities and colleagues, came to a compromise with his better judgment: he would snatch a success in Gallipoli and then transport all troops back to France. But his calculations were too fine: it was the Germans who held the initiative and made the game, since they still threatened to overwhelm France and take the Channel ports. On the 21st February, 1915, the French Ambassador conveyed to Grey the declaration of Joffre: unless the 29th Division (which had been promised for Gallipoli) was available in France he would not guarantee the immunity of the line. Joffre, himself, put the case quite simply to Kitchener on the 29th March. The West was the "decisive theatre"—"wanted all the ammunition which could be given and all the troops."

Sir Henry Wilson has set down in his Diaries the essentials of this great question. The enemy held nearly all Belgium and the industrial North of France: these two Allies must perish or be released. Moreover if the defeat of the enemy was the end of the war for England, where could there be a better field than in Flanders and France—with a short sea passage, short railways and short roads for the carriage of troops? To open out a long and circuitous route through the pillars of Hercules to the other end of the Mediterranean meant a dispersion of troops and a disorganisation of shipping—nor could the enemy be reached at the

end of it. "Sir John told me he had just got news that four more divisions were to go to the Dardanelles at once. . . . It is simply incredible. This makes, I think, 9 there and 22 here, and not a single Boche facing the 9. How they will laugh in Berlin!"<sup>1</sup>

Wilson saw in the new Government the entry of his friends and therefore his opportunity. "New Cabinet," he notes in his Diary on 22nd June, 1915, "anxious to do what is right, grossly ignorant, no military advice except Kitchener's which is dis-trusted. I am anxious about future, about strain on France, about Dardanelles, about Russia." For Russia too, hard pressed in Galicia, the best hope as he perceived was pressure on her enemy in the West.

Such were the calculations which led Wilson to write the following letter to Carson, his best friend in the new Government:

"20.6.15.

"MY DEAR SIR EDWARD,—Cecil tells me she met you at dinner a few nights ago at Lansdowne House—this is my excuse for writing.

"For the first time since September 5th when we turned on the Marne, I am a little anxious about the future. Not the immediate future, not, in a sense, the military future, but the future of this war.

"We (English) began this war with 4 divisions, we now have 22, and to many it would appear that we have done more, much more, than our French friends could have expected. This in a sense is so, but in the wider sense and in the greater issues it is *not* so. Many things we have done which annoy, and rightly, our French friends. Of these I need only mention a few: Antwerp, Dardanelles, lack of ammunition.

"The French are already beginning to look forward to the autumn and the winter (to-morrow is the longest day!) and they are beginning to ask themselves whether in the coming winter the English are only going to hold 40 miles of front and allow them (the French) to hold 400 miles! They wonder about the Dardanelles, they are actively angry about our ammunition which cripples our action and which throws the larger offensive on them.

<sup>1</sup> *Wilson's War Diaries* (Callwell), vol. I., p. 281.



" For example in the fighting since June 16th (only 5 days) we may have lost 8,000 men and they have lost something like 80,000-90,000. Their population is 39,000,000 and ours (exclusive of Colonies) is about 46,000,000.

" These are the sort of questions now being asked by the French. In munitions the Germans and Austrians are making some 250,000 shells a day; the French (with five-sixths of their steel-workers in Boche hands) are making about 100,000 a day, and we are making about 9,000 a day !

" Now all these and many other things may lead to trouble, and we must walk warily to avoid the pitfalls. When next I see you I would much like a good talk and much like to lay out the picture as it appears to the French, and to me, of the future.

" So sorry to bother you with a letter in haste.

" Very sincerely yours,

" HENRY WILSON."

Sir Henry Wilson was neither entirely accurate nor entirely fair in his comparisons. In May 1915 this country was producing about 15,600 shells per day and the output was rapidly increasing. Moreover we had set out almost from zero whereas the French and Germans had started with the power to supply the 4,000 and 8,000 guns with which their armies were respectively provided. Wilson was not an engineer nor could he realise the difficulties of a country which had been content to take its gun-sights from Austria and its high explosives from Germany.

These, however, were matters of detail; of the General's main ideas there came support from an expert in public opinion. That big, restless, eccentric, and incalculable journalist, Lord Northcliffe, was at that time owner not only of the *Daily Mail* and the *Evening News*, but of *The Times*, and was blowing through all the pipes of his organ a diapason of alarm at the conduct of the war. He had, however, a high opinion of the Attorney-General. " Carson is an able man," he said to his friend Riddell, a little later, " he is a stout-hearted fellow."<sup>1</sup> And on the 27th June, 1915, he wrote (from *The Times*) to much the same effect as Wilson had written:

<sup>1</sup> The conversation was on the 21st October, 1915. See Lord Riddell's *War Diary* for that date, p. 127.

"DEAR SIR EDWARD,

"I think that you, as a member of the Cabinet, ought to know that the English workers in my French newspaper office notice a growing hostility to England on the part of Parisians. One or two of my people have complained that their position in France is becoming very difficult and that they wish to return.

"The matter is of great importance inasmuch as the Germans have told my agents in Germany that they have no doubt that they will be able to tire out the French and make a separate peace.

"I drew the attention of the Prime Minister to this matter six months ago, and offered a suggestion for its remedy, but the thing was stopped by Lord Kitchener. It is one of the few anxieties of the war that can be remedied.

"Mr. Lloyd George is aware of the hostility referred to.

"Yours sincerely,

"NORTHCLETTE."

And Northcliffe wrote again, more at length, and even more urgently on the 30th June:

"Pray do not think me persistent but when a serious danger can be avoided it should in my judgment be avoided.

"Except through journals like *Le Temps*, which, as you know, are not much more generally seen in France than the *London Gazette* is in England, practically nothing is known in France of the work we are doing and the sacrifices we are making.

"German agents, aided by a large number of French people, are circulating the motto 'Germany will fight to the last German, and England to the last Frenchman.' The effect is that the French aristocracy is sarcastic about England, the bourgeoisie rude and much of the working class violently offensive. Von Falkenhayn, the head of the German Army, told a *Times* representative lately that the German plan is to tire out the French and make a separate treaty with them."

After giving an account of the proposals for Press propaganda which he had laid before Mr. Asquith, Lord Northcliffe continued:

"The French people do not believe that we are making an effort, and I respectfully urge that it is possible that before we

are aware of it *pourparlers* may be going on between the French radical socialists and the Germans. General Joffre has said that he will shoot, without trial, any French deputy concerned in such negotiations but it is a fact that the majority of the French people are very weary of having the Germans in their midst, and that, after another winter in the trenches, the Germans may succeed in their desire to make a separate peace with France.

"I would very much like to see you on this subject."

On the day that Northcliffe wrote this letter Sir Henry Wilson was in London, conferring with Kitchener on these large questions. On the 2nd of July, 1915, he notes in his Diary:

"At four o'clock we had a meeting at Bonar's house of Bonar, Walter Long, Carson and self. We talked for two hours, and I got all three to agree to oppose sending further troops to Gallipoli and to send all troops to France on programme."

We see from Carson's speeches at that time that his conception of the war agreed with Wilson's and, indeed, with Kitchener's—that it was a long, sad, stern business, which could not be won by any trick or diversion, but must be fought out to a finish on the fields of France and Flanders. Thus on the 9th July, 1915, the Attorney-General reinforced the Secretary of State's plea for men in a recruiting meeting at Guildhall.

"We have a fixed task before us," said Carson. "So long as one enemy soldier continues on French, Belgian or Russian soil, no question of peace can ever enter into the thoughts of any honest, patriotic and courageous man in this country."

It was a bitter struggle for life itself: "People seem to forget that the very existence of the country is at stake." Moreover, "It is our primary duty to our Allies to see this matter through with them, and we will at whatever cost. But do not let us underrate the difficulties. That is the extremest folly of all. We have been for 11 months at war, and the Germans are still in firm occupation of almost the whole of Belgium and a considerable portion of France." And he was explicit on one point from which many of his colleagues shrank.

"There is no use in abusing the Germans," he said. "That won't kill one of them. Recollect that upon the signing of a decree, as at the bugle's call, men of any class and of any age in Germany go to the colours. We have to set up against that our

voluntary recruiting—so far . . . it is now on its trial . . . if it fails does anybody for a moment think that we ought to hesitate to apply compulsory service? ”

A month later<sup>1</sup> he was making the same case with even more urgency. He mourned the heavy defeats of Russia. “ We might to a large extent have to go without her help and still we had before us the task we were determined to fulfil, to drive out of Belgium and out of France every German that at present desolated and insulted their soil.” “ Speaking solely his own opinions,” he declared his belief in the need for universal service: “ At the present time every man and woman in France and Russia is at war. What I want is that every man and woman in this United Kingdom and Empire should be at war.” And he contrasted the case of the men in the trenches who if they “ downed tools ” would be shot with the men in the workshops who when they downed tools expected their wages to be raised.

These speeches suggest already that the ardour and vehemence of Carson’s temper—his conception of the war as a matter of life and death—was driving him ahead of the Government in which he served. The phrase, “ speaking solely his own opinions,” suggests especially a difference on the burning issue of conscription, upon which he had good reason to feel bitterly. The Prime Minister, knowing and allowing for the minds of his Liberal colleagues, would not be hurried; and the Attorney-General came more and more to the belief, which many at that time shared, that victory could not be hoped from such a Cabinet and from the balancing and temporising mind of the Prime Minister. Terrible events were to confirm Carson in this conviction and bring him to a crisis.

<sup>1</sup> At Hove on 4th August, 1915.

## CHAPTER VI

### *Registration*

The aching tooth - The Doomsday Book - Walter Long gets worried - Arthur Henderson - Prize cases.

BEFORE, however, we come to the crisis, we must turn to some other matters, inside and outside his Department, which occupied the mind of the Attorney-General.

On the eve of the declaration of war Carson had said to his old coachman and chauffeur, as he stepped into his motor-car at Pembroke Lodge: "Brookes, there will be no more of Ireland until we have done with this job," yet Ireland obstinately obtruded herself at every turn. Thus he had a letter from his friend J. Mackay Wilson, the brother of Sir Henry Wilson, from Currygrane in County Longford, on the dangerous situation of the Unionists in the South and West. Wilson complained of "dry rot" in the Irish Unionist Alliance, and an "irresponsible committee" which was compromising the "great and sacred cause of the Union." Wilson referred to the effort made by a section of the Irish Unionist Alliance to work with the Nationalist Volunteers: "I remember how your telegram stopped that mad attempt, and I believe there is now a crying necessity for the help of yourself and your colleague, our only representatives in the South and West," and he went on to speak of the hopes and fears of the Irish Unionists, above all how they were "eagerly and anxiously awaiting your assistance and advice."

Another of his Dublin friends, F. Elvington Ball, wrote in the same strain—of his disquietude at the management of the Alliance, of some "adverse influence" at work, and how "the rank and file are still prepared to offer an uncompromising resistance to Home Rule and look to you for light and leading."

Thus the braver spirits in that doomed community struggled with an encircling fate, against which neither Carson nor any

friend could any longer help them. Ireland, like an aching tooth, occupied and irritated not only the mind of Carson but of the Government.

It came into the recruiting question, since the case of Ireland lent emphasis to the injustice of the voluntary system. Whereas Inverness-shire furnished 60 per cent of her manhood, Perthshire 67·8 per cent, Warwickshire 46·8 per cent, Dorset 40 per cent and London 36·3 per cent, Dublin provided 17·4 per cent, Queen's County 12·7 per cent, Donegal 4·9 per cent, Clare and Mayo 3·5 per cent. Only in the north-east corner—in Antrim, Armagh and County Down—did the figures range above 20 per cent.<sup>1</sup>

The Government postponed the inevitable decision, and fell back upon a sort of Doomsday Book of National Registration, "with the object of ascertaining," as Lord Kitchener explained it, "how many men and women there are in the country between the ages of 19 and 65, eligible for the national service, whether in the Navy or Army or for the manufacture of munitions or to fulfil other necessary services." It was, however, anxiously explained by his colleagues that it had nothing at all to do with conscription. "This Bill," said Walter Long, who had charge of the measure, "leaves the question of compulsory service exactly where it is and where it has been; it does not affect it one way or another." Despite such assurances, the Irish Nationalist Party would have none of it, and Dublin Castle, then in the last stages of decadence, obsequiously accepted their orders.

These differences were reflected in the Government. Thus Walter Long, then President of the Local Government Board, wrote to Carson on the 1st July, 1915:

"MY DEAR NED,—There is trouble about the Irish clause to the Registration Bill. As the matter was left after the Cabinet, Birrell was to draw a clause to make the Bill apply to Ireland, subject to your approval, and when it reached me, I am ashamed to say I did not read it! Now I find it is not only permissive but Section (c) of Clause 4 is omitted and our Ulster friends are all very angry. What is best to be done?

<sup>1</sup> Statement of number of recruits raised by Counties from 4th August, 1914, to 30th April, 1915.

"Nathan<sup>1</sup> told me it was permissive but I had no idea C. was omitted.

"Yours ever,

"WALTER H. LONG."

Next day Walter Long wrote again: the thing was "preposterous"—"a clear attempt to evade the decision of the Cabinet in a most peculiar fashion." He enclosed a memorandum on the subject: the Cabinet decision to include Ireland had been unanimous; the Prime Minister had "strongly held" that view; Mr. Birrell had not informed Mr. Long of the omission; Sir Matthew Nathan had also left him in ignorance. "And if it is true, as it is rumoured, that the clause has been deliberately so framed *in order to leave Ireland out*, it is obvious that I cannot consent to it," etc.

How Walter Long was assuaged does not appear. The Attorney-General no doubt helped to allay the storm, for the Bill was of no importance, and he probably agreed with Alexander McDowell, that it was better to have the Bill without Ireland than to have a "row": "All we here in Ulster ought to be concerned with," the solicitor wrote, "is that we shall be in a position to say to the country—'We want to do our bit and to do it on the same lines as in England.' " It is certain that Carson made no suggestion of these differences in Committee of the whole House when he expounded the Government view on the application of the Bill to Ireland.<sup>2</sup>

Nevertheless, it made a precedent: the divergence of status as between Irish and British subjects of the King in the Great War had begun.

These were not the only differences in that Coalition. A Socialist newspaper, the *Labour Leader*, had been agitating both against recruiting and against the British cause on the lines of, "Down with the war, it is a war of the ruling classes," and had been prosecuted, with partial success, before the Salford Stipendiary Magistrate, at the instance of Sir Charles Mathews. Mr. Arthur Henderson, who was President of the Board of Education, felt himself aggrieved and rose angrily in Cabinet to

<sup>1</sup> Sir Matthew Nathan, Under-Secretary to the Lord-Lieutenant of Ireland, 1914-16.

<sup>2</sup> Parl. Deb., H. of C., vol. lxxiii., c. 587 *et seq.*

complain that the Law Officers of the Crown had proceeded in the case without consulting him.

This brought the Attorney-General to his feet. "Mr. Prime Minister," he said, "I take full responsibility for the action of the Director of Public Prosecutions. His duty and mine is to administer the law without fear or favour, and to tamper with the course of justice in deference to a colleague, or for any political consideration whatsoever, is a thing to which I will never demean myself."

"I entirely agree with the Attorney-General," said the Prime Minister severely, "it would have been most improper," and Arthur Henderson collapsed without a word under the double rebuke.

Of Carson's legal work in this brief tenure of office there is little to say. He figures in only one case, other than Prize Cases, reported in the Law Reports,<sup>1</sup> and appeared for the Crown in only one important criminal prosecution, that of Hahn and Mueller at the Central Criminal Court in May 1915. The case is not reported; but the Attorney-General secured a conviction and the spies were duly executed. It was a duty which Carson very much disliked; humane and magnanimous, he could not but pity brave men who thus died ignominiously for the Fatherland.

War, although it is said to make laws silent, has its legalities, which the Attorney-General had to consider. Thus the Admiralty were in doubt as to whether merchant ships could arm in self-defence. Admiral Custance held that they had this right, although they had not the right to attack. The First Sea Lord referred the question to the Law Officers for a ruling and their report, signed by R. B. Finlay and Edward Carson, held that "merchant vessels may resist capture and carry arms for that purpose."<sup>2</sup>

Carson appeared besides in a number of Prize Cases, of which the *Roumanian*, the *Odessa*, the *Woolston*, the *Kim*, the *Alfred Nobel*, the *Björnsternjne Björnson*, the *Fridland* and the *Zamora* (all reported in Lloyd's Prize Cases) are a representative selection.

<sup>1</sup>A Revenue Appeal to the House of Lords. *Drummond v. Collins*, [1915] A.C. 1011.

<sup>2</sup>*The Life of Prince Louis of Battenberg*, by Admiral Mark Kerr, p. 161.



Of these cases by far the most interesting and important was that of the steamship *Kim*, which was opened before Sir Samuel Evans by the Attorney-General on the 12th July, 1915. Upon it hung the cases of the *Alfred Nobel*, the *Björnsternjne Björnson* and the *Fridland*, which were tried with it, and there were also in Court some thirty-eight other ships, the destinies of which hung more or less on the same thread.

The *Kim* and her consorts, the Attorney-General explained, were carrying foodstuffs and "hog-produce" from the great meat factories in America, called the "Six Big Men," to Copenhagen, which had been "turned into a depot for the feeding of the enemy's troops and garrisons all along the coast of the Baltic." Two of the vessels carried consignments of rubber, which had falsely been described as "gum" in the manifesto, and there was a consignment of hides claimed by Danish consignees who were found to be merely intermediaries between the sellers and their German houses. The Crown claimed the condemnation of all the goods on the ground that their ultimate destination was Germany, and that, as far as conditional contraband was concerned, they were destined for the use of the German Government and its forces.

In the course of the case, which was continued for the Crown by the Solicitor-General, it was shown that whereas Denmark was accustomed to export and not to import foodstuffs, these four vessels carried within three weeks upwards of 73 million pounds of cargo. Of lard alone they had thirteen times the quantity imported annually to Denmark in the three years before the war.

The facts were hardly in doubt; the true destination of the cargoes was evident; by the doctrine of "continuous voyage" they were good prize. There was, however, one complication which involved a great deal of argument and confusion. Before the war the Government had tried to replace the Prize Law of our Courts of Admiralty by the Declaration of London, an international code in the framing of which the Germans had (as was thought) far too much influence. In some vital matters it modified the law in favour of the weaker naval Power. Thus, by Article 85, conditional contraband was not liable to capture except when found in a vessel bound for enemy territory. True, the

Declaration had been defeated in the House of Lords and was therefore of no validity; but the Government, after war broke out, had partially enforced it by Order in Council and had progressively withdrawn it by subsequent Orders in Council. As these orders were at different dates, the state of the law was different at different times, a circumstance of which the enemy and the neutrals took full advantage.

The President of the Court, however, was not prevented by these complexities from giving judgment for the Crown. "I have come to the conclusion," said Sir Samuel Evans, "that the cargoes were not on their way to Denmark to be incorporated into the common stock of that country . . . but, on the contrary, that they were on their way not only to German territory, but also to the German Government and their forces for naval and military use as their real ultimate destination: to hold to the contrary would be to allow one's eyes to be filled by the dust of theories and technicalities, and to be blinded to the realities of the case."<sup>1</sup>

Unfortunately the infirmity of the Government ill-supported the strength of the Court.

Another Prize Court case in which Sir Edward Carson was concerned had an important bearing on International Law. The *Zamora*, a Swedish ship bound from New York to Stockholm, was made prize and brought before the Prize Court. While the case was pending His Majesty's Government cast envious eyes on 400 tons of copper which was part of the cargo, and applied to the Court for leave to take over the copper at a valuation pending judgment.

The Attorney-General argued that the Prize Court was bound by Orders in Council which enabled the Crown to seize property for the defence of the realm, no matter whether it belonged to foreigners or to British subjects. The owners of the copper (represented by Mr. Leslie Scott) pleaded that they were Swedish subjects who had bought the copper in America for sale in Sweden, and were willing besides to guarantee that the copper would not find its way into German hands. Nevertheless Sir Samuel Evans found that the Order in Council being valid, he would be failing in his duty if he did not act upon it. The Judicial

<sup>1</sup> Lloyd's Reports of Prize Court Cases, vol. iii., pp. 167-872.

Committee of the Privy Council reversed the judgment on the ground that the Prize Court was constituted to administer International Law and could not take directions from the Crown.<sup>1</sup>

It might seem strange that a Government which had sought to limit its own rights of blockade and of capture should seize the property of neutrals; but there is apt to be a difference between the rude practice of war and the fine ideals of peace. Sir Edward Carson, as we shall presently see, had his own ideas on this subject.

<sup>1</sup> Lloyd's Reports of Prize Court Cases, vol. iv.

## CHAPTER VII

### *Conscription*

Walter Long – Kitchener hesitates – Lord Northcliffe – Thoughts of prosecution –  
Time-expired men – James Craig.

WE get a hint of the urgencies which were to wreck that unhappy Coalition in a letter (of the 7th August, 1915) to "My dear Ned" from his friend and colleague, Walter Long.

"I am very anxious about the situation," wrote the President of the Local Government Board; "the position in France and Flanders is, in my judgment, most unsatisfactory. Meanwhile it cannot be said that the Government have as yet made any supreme effort. *Up to the present* I think the defence of the Coalition Government is complete. Nobody out of Bedlam would expect us in two months to clear up the mess made in the preceding nine months, but when Parliament meets it will be a very different matter. We shall have been in office four months, we shall have had six or seven weeks' recess, plenty of time to master things and make up our minds, and if we are not ready with a definite policy I believe that the country will disown us and a considerable proportion of the House of Commons will be gravely dissatisfied."

Walter Long, it is said, had stipulated for conscription upon entering the Government, and it is plain from this letter that he was far from content with the makeshift of Registration.

"The first step we ought, in my judgment, to take," he continued, "and without delay, is to impose the obligation of compulsory National Service upon the country. This would enable us to order people to do this or that instead of advising them to do it; this would enable us to get the men we want for the Army in the most economical way. . . ."

Long had evidently been trying to get his colleagues into line. "I am sending you," he went on, "a copy of the Memo I wrote and wanted to circulate, but both Lansdowne and Bonar Law

say 'No.' I know you feel strongly on this subject as on others and that we agree. . . ." Carson, as we have already seen, did feel strongly on the subject and with reason. As an Irish Loyalist he saw his community being dreadfully thinned by the war, while the Irish Nationalists grew comparatively in numbers and in strength, a thing that outraged his sense of justice and filled his mind with forebodings. Not obscurely he had pressed Lord Kitchener at Guildhall to make the great decision. "We tell Lord Kitchener to-day," he had said, "that whatever he asks as necessary for the final victory, the nation will give him wholeheartedly. . . . Whatever Lord Kitchener asks he will get; no Government ought to exist for five months which refuses it to him."<sup>1</sup>

But Kitchener hesitated. His mind seems to have lost at that time something of its former courage. One night he asked Carson to dine with him and unloaded his mind of its dreadful burden of doubts and fears. It had been calculated, he said, that with a wastage calculated at 150,000 a month the French Armies could not be kept at full strength beyond the end of October 1915. And, he exclaimed, "We shall only be able to persuade England to accept conscription when the French are beaten."

"Better do it now," said Carson.

"The Trades Unions," Kitchener replied, "will never consent."

"Leave that to us," said Carson; "it is no business of yours. I know this nation; whatever you say you want, it will give."

But Kitchener was obstinately despondent. He complained of the attacks made on him by some Irish Nationalists. Surely they, at least, he said, might feel for me as I was born and bred in Ireland.

"Ah," said Carson, to rally him out of his gloom, "but as they say over there, to be born on a housetop does not make you a sparrow."

Carson himself tackled the Trades Unions. In September 1915 he had a skirmish with one of them, and faced them with the dilemma: "If conscription is proved to be necessary, would your Union be prepared to oppose it—with the logical result of our country being defeated in the present war?"

<sup>1</sup> 9th July, 1915.

It was a dilemma to which the stout-hearted British workman would have found a ready solution; but the trade union officials and professional politicians who spoke in his name were of another mind. The Trades Union Congress resolved against conscription, and Mr. J. H. Thomas, in the House of Commons, declared that "if you compelled the Government to deal with compulsory service, you might, unfortunately perhaps, have an *industrial revolution*."<sup>1</sup>

Lord Derby undertook the forlorn hope of voluntary recruiting and the Secretary of State hesitated between the two systems, pulled this way and that between the Conservatives and the Radicals in the Cabinet. We get a glimpse into this interior conflict in a letter of the 12th September, 1915, to Lady Carson from Mr. H. A. Gwynne, the Editor of the *Morning Post*, who was an old friend both of Carson and of Kitchener.

"About K. tell your husband I don't know what to think. I had last Tuesday three quarters of an hour of wrestling with him: after that he sent for me and I had another hour's talk. I was sorry for him, for apparently the 'antis' have had free access to him. Two weeks ago I would have betted my last bob on compulsion. To-day I confess I am uneasy. French has been got at (I mean Sir J.) and has written to say that he doubts whether conscripts and free men can mix together in the ranks. Did you ever hear such hosh?"

"Tell your husband that I am making a last desperate try to put him straight and I'll let him know the result. . . . Tell your husband I am full of faith in him. He must not be depressed because he feels he is not doing all he can."

Carson, certainly, was doing all he could do, inside the Cabinet and out of it. His speech at Guildhall in July had been almost a public appeal to his colleagues to take their courage in both hands; his speech at Hove in August, although it expressed "solely his own opinion," was to the same effect.

Carson, however, set his face against the intrigues which accompanied these demands. Thus at Guildhall, he said: "I don't know a poorer service that any man can do to this country than to attempt, even in the very smallest degree, to shake the confidence of the nation in Lord Kitchener." These speeches

<sup>1</sup> 16th September, 1915. Official Debates, H. of C., vol. lxxiv., c. 207.

brought him another characteristic letter from Lord Northcliffe. On 9th August, 1915, the great journalist wrote:

“ *Gallipoli.*

“ DEAR SIR EDWARD,

“ It is not wise to discuss this disastrous expedition in my newspaper, though the Germans are intimately informed of our impending catastrophe. *Can nothing be done to minimise it?* Lord Fisher had a plan some ten weeks ago. I suggest you see Mr. Granville Fortescue, the only person in England who has looked down upon our men from the Turkish side. Forgive my again worrying you upon the matter.

“ *Lord Kitchener.*

“ Your speeches suggest that my newspapers have some motive in criticising him. I do not know Lord Kitchener personally, but for 10 months he had the power of Oliver Cromwell as to shells. To-day he has the same power as to compulsion. Yet within the last few weeks he sends a circular to the newspapers suggesting I am wrong to urge this vital necessity. I don't trust Lord Kitchener nor do the Scotch and the North of England folk. The London mob knows little of war and will cheer the Tichborne claimant or Jack Johnson.

“ *A Separate Peace with France.*

“ If you know anyone who understands the French, send him for a fortnight mingling with French people, and you will find that the German propaganda ‘ Germany will fight to the last German and England to the last Frenchman ’ steadily gaining. On that ground alone Lord Kitchener is unwise to oppose compulsion. The mothers of France *cannot* understand why *their* boys should be compelled to fight and ours not.

“ If I could see you on these subjects I should be glad. *The Times* and *Daily Mail* secret service abroad is I think at least as good as your Government's, if not so *couleur de rose*.

“ I will be in London, 16th.

“ Yours sincerely,

“ NORTHCLIFFE.”

Northcliffe, although he maintained a reluctant silence over Gallipoli was less reticent about conscription. Through his newspapers he attacked both Lord Kitchener and the Government, and by a strange irony we find Carson, as Attorney-General, considering the case for a prosecution both of *The Times* and the *Daily Mail*.

The alleged offences were contained in the *Daily Mail* of the 7th and *The Times* of the 10th September, 1915. "The country," said the *Daily Mail*, "has had enough of it. It understands honest and equal compulsion. It does not understand sneaking and haphazard compulsion under the guise of 'moral pressure' exerted by irresponsible canvassers on behalf of the Government that has not the moral courage to apply it itself." The article was entitled, "Recruiting by Blackmail." And *The Times*, following in the wake of its contemporary, in an article entitled, "The Government and the Pink Forms," protested against "a fresh campaign of private pressure."

There was correspondence on the subject between Ministers and the Law Officers of the Crown. On 11th September, 1915, F. E. Smith contributed a characteristic opinion. The Government, he wrote, had no case. He wished that they had.

Thoughts of a prosecution came to nothing; but there was a crisis within the Government over the hard case of the time-expired who were due for release yet could not be spared from the Army. In the Cabinet, on the 14th September, 1915, the Secretary of State for War handed the Attorney-General a copy of the Draft Military Service (Prolongation) Bill for his opinion, and Carson scribbled a note:

"You have no power over time-expired men without an Act of Parliament. If there is an Act I would prefer to have it as an Amendment of the Army Act but this is perhaps only a matter of form.—E. CARSON."

"I quite agree," Kitchener noted, "but I hope there will be no difficulty in passing the Act as an Amendment shortly through Parliament."

The Attorney-General, thereupon, passed a note to the Prime Minister:



*"Time-expired Men."*

"There must be a Bill if these men are to be kept on. It should be in form of an amendment to Army Act. I fear it will raise question of compulsion. Lord K. presses for Bill and I think imagines it can easily be got thro' House—But *quære* ?

"E. CARSON."

To which the Prime Minister appended the comment:

"Lord K. knows very little of the H. of Commons. I fully share your doubts.—H. H. ASQUITH."

The Army murmured against the injustice of the proposal, yet the Government hesitated. On the 30th September, 1915, the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for War held a secret meeting with various Labour organisations and told them that the rate of recruiting was unequal to the need; but nothing was decided save that the Labour politicians agreed to organise a special recruiting campaign.

Thus the issue was allowed to hang in painful doubt like all the other issues, as Carson was to find, in that divided Coalition of 1915. Those were times of heavy stress for all men—times of anxiety, darkness and doubt, when the news day by day was of the death of a friend or a disaster in the field. Carson evidently turned in his anxieties to James Craig, as to an unshakable rock, as to a man

*Whose blood and judgment are so well commingled  
That they are not a pipe for fortune's finger  
To sound what stop she please.*

But even James Craig was shaken, less in spirit than in health, as we gather from his reply to a letter from Carson:

"Your very kind letter," Craig wrote on the 11th August, 1915 (from Bude in Cornwall), "fills me with new courage to face the disappointment of severing my connection with the Ulster Division, if it has to be. I went before a Medical Board at Exeter on Saturday, and, although I have not yet heard the result officially, I fear the worst as the poison is still very active and the arthritis worrying me practically all the time. Thank

you so much for all you have done. The letter to Sir Henry Selater will assure that I am kept busy, which is all I want. Just to do my bit when pronounced fit.

"I do hope you won't break down with the strain and the heavy work. To me it is simply astonishing that affairs are managed as at present. I have had so much time to think. What is obviously needed is a Committee of five, with no portfolios except Admiralty and War. A free hand and every assistance! It will, I hope, come to that soon. Seven is too many. National service next even if only a few men are called up, to get the principle established! I can see no good whatever in the Registration Bill and can only pity Walter Long for having to father it. I am sure you have an uphill fight many a time. Can't I see it all! However rumours reach me from time to time that you are the strong man of the Cabinet and I am comforted. But you must not over-strain yourself, which is Ruby's department. God bless her that she is what she is and what you find her and I know what it means very well!

"Give her my kindest messages; we are always thinking of you both, what you are going through, how it will all end and who will be left at long last to say No Home Rule.

"Courage and patience in yourself and the love of Ruby and Ulster will enable you to carry through a task that would kill any ordinary mortal.

"I will let you know how things go. Very glad to say that the heart remains as large as an elephant's despite everything.

"Yours ever,

"JAMES CRAIG."

Such generous words—the nearest thing to emotion we find in the correspondence of these two dear friends—must have heartened the Attorney-General when he turned to the perplexing and unfamiliar field of war, for which, as a Member of the Cabinet, he shared a heavy responsibility.

## CHAPTER VIII

### *The Dardanelles*

The Dardanelles Committee – A man of mystery – Kitchener reveals himself – One false step leads to another – Carson's opinion – Mr. Birrell complains – Sir Bryan Mahon – Bonar Law writes to Carson – Keith Murdoch.

THE Cabinet, of which Sir Edward Carson had been a member since the beginning of the Coalition, was indeed responsible for the war, but its actual conduct was in the hands of a Committee of the Cabinet called at that time the Dardanelles Committee. Of this inner circle of the Government, Carson only became a member in August 1915, after the landing at Suvla Bay had brought matters to a fresh crisis.

It had always been an unhappy family, this War Council; but by the time Carson joined it, its divisions, hesitations and antagonisms had brought it to the verge of rupture. Almost every member was pulling his own way, and Mr. Asquith in despair of solving its difficulties sought only to postpone them. "Gentlemen," he would say, "we shall leave these disagreeable things to think about overnight."

Lord Kitchener was alone among them, not statesman but soldier, suspicious of them all, concealing his doubts, jealous of his secrets, a man of mystery, his heavy moustache seeming to curl a little in scorn of their ignorant and presumptuous talk. In Carson's opinion it had been a mistake to bring this professional soldier into the Ministry: he thought it besides unconstitutional, destructive both of the unity and responsibility of Cabinet Government. In August 1914, the Imperial General Staff had, most unwisely, been dissipated in the field; its Chief, Sir John French, had been sent to command the Expeditionary Force in Flanders, and he had taken most of his General Officers with him. "Lord Kitchener," in the testimony of Mr. Asquith, "had perforce in the first months to be

his own Chief of the Staff." All the men qualified by special knowledge were on active service at the Front. Sir James Wolfe Murray, nominally C.I.G.S., was so much in awe of Kitchener that he never obtruded nor was he ever asked for an opinion. General Callwell said that "the General Staff had practically ceased to exist because it was not consulted," although it is fair to add that other soldiers gave a different account of the War Office under Lord Kitchener, and doubtless he consulted those whom he knew best or trusted most.<sup>1</sup> As for the other experts who found an unobtrusive place in the War Council, Admiral Fisher and Sir Arthur Wilson testified that they did not consider it their duty to offer an opinion unless they were asked—and they were never asked. Although Ministers, in evidence, were inclined to deny these statements, yet Lord Crewe admitted, and Lord Haldane agreed, "that the political Members of the Committee did too much of the talking and the expert Members, as a rule, too little."

Thus in the Cabinet Committee Lord Kitchener was both Minister of State and the only Military expert. "Scarcely anyone," Mr. Churchill afterwards told the Dardanelles Commission, "even ventured to argue with him in Council—all powerful, imperturbable, reserved, he dominated absolutely our counsels at this time."

Reserved Kitchener certainly was. The Commission put his silence down to "the strong opinion Lord Kitchener entertained as to the absolute necessity of maintaining the strictest secrecy in respect to all matters connected with military operations," but it is also true that he distrusted his political colleagues. The Attorney-General one day found him, at the window of the Cabinet room, shaken out of his taciturnity by bad news from the Front.

"Johnnie French," he kept muttering in an agony of irritation, "is losing the war every day."

"There is one man you should confide in," said Carson, jerking his thumb backwards at the Prime Minister, who was still in his seat at the table.

"I don't trust these politicians," Kitchener replied.

<sup>1</sup> The reader may be advised to compare the Report of the Dardanelles Commission with Arthur's *Life of Lord Kitchener* on this subject.

"But if French is doing badly, you should appoint another Commander-in-Chief," Carson insisted.

"I know, but I cannot think of one," said Kitchener.

Yet Kitchener did confide sometimes in the Prime Minister, whom he seemed to trust more than some other of his colleagues. "I pace my room at night," he said to Asquith about the evacuation of Gallipoli, "and see the boats fired at and capsizing and the drowning men."

Under his iron mask Kitchener concealed the softnesses and the limitations of our common humanity. "They expect too much of me, these fellows," he whispered to Carson one day at the Cabinet table. "I don't know Europe; I don't know England, and I don't know the British Army."

Nor was it true that Kitchener was all powerful in the War Council of which he was so discomfiting and uncomfortable a member. It would seem that he was cajoled and over-persuaded into the Gallipoli adventure. He said always—and it was clear from the figures—that there were no troops, nor arms, nor transport to spare for joint operations in the Eastern Mediterranean. On the 7th, 8th and 13th January, 1915, as Mr. Asquith notes in his Diary, the War Council made a "three days' survey of the troops available," and decided that there were none available. What then was the use of talking? "You cannot make war as you would," said Kitchener, "but as you must."

Admiral Carden had an idea that the forts of the Dardanelles could be reduced and the passage forced by ships alone. If Mr. Churchill could not have a joint operation, he was ready, he was even eager, to risk a squadron in the attempt. It was contrary to the teaching of experience and to the pre-war opinion of the General Staff. It was contrary also to the opinion of the Greek General Staff which had made a special study of the problem. Nevertheless, if the sailors thought they could do it, they were welcome to try!

Such was Kitchener's attitude in the early spring 1915; but one false step leads to another. When the combined Naval squadron was crippled in the operation there was a clamour to redress the balance by a landing. The Turkish attack on Egypt had failed; the 29th Division was available; surely it might be spared in an attempt which, if it succeeded, promised a brilliant

victory. Mr. Churchill was pressing; he had convinced Mr. Asquith; Russia was also pressing. Kitchener gave a grudging consent, then withdrew, then was drawn into it again, a little at first, then more and more, until at last this attempt by Ian Hamilton had been made, with a respectable Army.

The Gallipoli Peninsula runs into the Aegean like the claw of a lobster, a strong dangerous claw lying like a trap in the sea to catch any unwary mollusc which ventured within or upon it. Lord Fisher after the crunch of the 18th of March had thought of nothing but to extricate his *Queen Elizabeth* from those terrible pincers. Lord Kitchener, no less misliking the adventure, was no less anxious about his soldiers; but he always took the line that once they were committed they must persist. He feared evacuation above all things, both for the losses to the troops and for the blow to British prestige throughout the Near and Middle East.

Carson made no pretence to be a judge either of the tactics or the strategy of the adventure. He did, however, realise that a peninsula, forty-five miles long and in parts eight broad, steep, mountainous, garrisoned and fortified, would require a large force both to capture and to occupy. Moreover, he could see that even if it were captured there would still be the Turks and the forts on the Asiatic side of those narrow Dardanelles. Carson's mental habit was to simplify every legal problem to its elements, and he used his method here. This was a big business; it required large forces, much munitions. As there were neither the attempt should not have been made and should be discontinued as soon as possible.

Being, however, mistrustful of his own mind on a subject both strange and technical, he tried to sound the deep and silent mind of Kitchener. What, he asked, would the Secretary of State do, supposing he captured the position? "I would withdraw every soldier from the place," said Kitchener, and the vehement reply confirmed Carson in his opinion.

To get at the facts of the actual situation was more difficult. Kitchener could not make up his mind to a withdrawal, and concealed the extent of the disaster from his colleagues of the Cabinet. Carson pressed Kitchener for the despatches. Kitchener tried to put him off with evasive replies.

We get a vivid glimpse of this struggle between the two men in a pathetic letter from his old adversary, the Chief Secretary for Ireland.

“DEAR ATTORNEY-GENERAL”—Mr. Birrell wrote to Carson on the 3rd September, 1915—“your gallant efforts this morning for *information* prior to action were not *wholly* in vain; but real information such as men demand in their ordinary and comparatively insignificant pursuits, we, as a *complete Cabinet*, can *never* get, either because (as is perhaps usually the case) it is not then available, or because it is undiscussable in so large and mixed a company. Eventually we may get it, or bits of it, but not until after some step has been taken which renders it worthless. Joint Cabinet responsibility in war-time is a sham and must remain one; but none the less we may all be hung and perhaps deservedly.

“You, at all events, are on the Dardanelles Committee, I am not; but the same rope may serve us both. Pardon these lucubrations.

“Yours sincerely,

“A. BIRRELL.”

The Attorney-General, as it happened, had both a special interest in and special information about the Gallipoli adventure. The 10th (Irish) Division formed part of the landing force. In it were battalions of regiments familiar to Carson from his childhood—Irish Rifles, Connaught Rangers, the Leinster Regiment, the Inniskillings, the Munster, the Dublin, and the Irish Fusiliers, and the Royal Irish Regiment—full of old friends or men well known to him, and in command, his cousin, friend of his youth, old school-fellow at Portarlington, Lieutenant-General Sir Bryan Mahon.

Mahon arrived at Mudros Bay on the 16th July, 1915. Soon afterwards he was writing familiarly and anxiously to “my dear Ned”:

“I know little or nothing of the situation here; but all I can gather is unsatisfactory.

“The new Divisions have been sent out without howitzers. . . . The expedition must go on and succeed as there is no  
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possibility of taking the troops away . . . but whether the gain will be worth the cost is another matter." If only the troops had been landed at the same time as the ships had begun to bombard the forts! Then things would have been different. As it was he could but hope that they would not fall into the same trench warfare as in Flanders—the Turks being splendid troops on the defensive. He put his trust in a big offensive, both in Flanders and at Gallipoli—in "large well-prepared and well-provided attacks."

Then on the 30th July, 1915, he wrote again, his forebodings confirmed:

"Since I wrote last I have been round all our positions. I am sorry to say I do not like the outlook. Our people have done splendidly and are now holding two very difficult positions; but both in a state of *close siege*. Not a man can show himself and every inch of the place is under shell-fire.

"In about six weeks storms commence here and the landing-places we use now will be impossible, and there are no harbours on the north of the Peninsula that are any use in stormy weather. We must have one on the Dardanelles or starve.

"Of course there will be an offensive soon which I hope and believe will be successful; but granted every success which can be counted on it does not make our position good."

Then Mahon went on to consider the position if they were besieged for the winter—in the confined space with the chance of an epidemic: "I believe," he concluded, "we would do better to evacuate the place . . . with loss of prestige, stores and munitions; but it would be better than losing a whole Army. The evacuation is, I think, possible but very difficult."

The General always came back to the main point—"Granting all the success we may expect we still will not hold the Asiatic shores of the Dardanelles, and they will not be open to the fleet. . . ."

So he fervently hoped that "nothing will induce the Government to sanction a winter campaign here. It is bound to end in disaster and at all costs ought to be abandoned."

There was a broader consideration—"The truth is that we have neither the munitions nor the organisation to carry on two big campaigns at the same time, and this has grown into



a big campaign now. I am sorry to have written such a doleful letter, but you asked for my opinion for what it is worth. . . .”

There was a third letter, dated the 14th August, 1915: the operations had failed, “and under present conditions and management will probably continue doing so. Organisation is *nil*.”

Then the old soldier went on to grumble about the way his Division had been broken up, “and put under strange leaders the first time they went into action.” The Nationalist Party were likely to make a grievance out of it—and it would be bad for recruiting in Ireland.

And on the 28th August, 1915, Sir Bryan Mahon wrote again of another attack which had failed, as “it was bound to before it started.” They were, as he had feared, in a state of close siege, in a very bad defensive position: “We occupy all the low ground. The Turks have all the high ground round two and a half sides of us. The fourth side is the sea . . . not an inch that is not under shell fire. The Turkish guns well placed; the naval guns cannot touch them, and we have very few field guns landed.”

With reinforcements they might hold on, but an effective offensive was impossible without at least three complete Army Corps and of first-line troops. “Do not think I am a croaker,” the old soldier ended, “I really enjoy being here—it is full of excitement; but you asked me . . . and I think you ought to know as one of His Majesty’s Ministers.

“The Irish Division could not have done better but it is mostly gone—nearly 70 per cent gone already. We have lost 40,000 since August 6th for nothing. Shells are bursting all round as I write this. I have just got back from the front trenches. I go most days as the men like seeing me, and it is almost all we can do for them—an exciting but rather dangerous walk.”

Meanwhile, Carson had made up his mind; but the Cabinet was to hesitate long in an agony of indecision. Kitchener would have withdrawn, but feared the results of withdrawal; Churchill, although no longer at the Admiralty, had won over Balfour to his view that, with vigour and determination, the prize could still be won. Lord Lansdowne, Lord Curzon and F. E. Smith agreed with them; the Prime Minister hoped against hope, and

Mr. Bonar Law, who had led the party of evacuation, swithered painfully in his opinion. "I thought I could do nothing better than to hold my tongue to-day," he wrote to Carson after the Cabinet meeting of 3rd September, 1915, "for, as you know, I thought we must take advantage of the French offer for the Dardanelles, and I did not wish to say anything against your view." And three days later Mr. Bonar Law wrote more at length:

"MY DEAR EDWARD,—I hope you will not write to Asquith till after you have heard Kitchener's report of his visit.

"It would be a tremendous blow if you left this Government and I had to remain in it; and especially on this subject in regard to which up till now, I have been against every step we have taken. Now the position seems to me this: up till now, even if we had available the forces necessary to take the Dardanelles, we could not have used them without offending the French to the point of endangering the alliance. We had therefore got into the position when the alternatives before us were to take away the troops at once from the Dardanelles or to stay there on the defensive indefinitely. After reading Thursday's account I thought that to stay on would have meant the destruction in the end of our forces there. But to withdraw now would be really one of the greatest disasters which have ever happened to Great Britain. I think, therefore, that we ought to take advantage of French approval and support to make a certainty of success at the Dardanelles, and at some risk in the French front if the French are willing to run the risk.

"Of course all this is on the assumption that if a sufficient force is sent we can succeed in the Dardanelles. Well, you and I cannot judge as to that, and we ought to have an independent military opinion. We have Kitchener's but apart from any question of his ability he is so committed that he cannot give an unbiassed view. What remedy is there for this? If you can suggest anything that is of any value I should back it as far as I could. Would the opinion of the Army Council be of any value?

"I have written this very hurriedly; but I hope to see you

before you have written to A. For one thing, is it not wise to delay till the Cabinet as there may be developments in connection with conscription before the design on the Dardanelles is taken, though that is not likely, as the Dardanelles must be decided at once?

“Yours sincerely,

“A. BONAR LAW.”

Sir Edward Carson, then, as appears plainly in this letter, proposed to resign from the Government over this question of evacuating Gallipoli. But he stayed on, in deference no doubt to the wishes of his friends. There was, however, another circumstance which greatly increased his disquietude. It happened that an Australian journalist, a Mr. Keith Murdoch, had been given a commission to look into postal matters at Gallipoli by the Australian Government, and was allowed to land at Anzac by Sir Ian Hamilton. Murdoch had a vivid impression of the horror, and what he took to be the hopelessness of that dreadful position on the fire-swept and pestilential beaches, and on coming to London he made it his business to report his impressions to his Government. He saw Sir Edward Carson among others, and Carson asked him if he had seen the Secretary of State for War. Murdoch replied that Kitchener had received other messengers from that front with such an ill grace that he thought it useless to see him. Carson, however, sent Murdoch to Lloyd George, and on 25th September, 1915, the Minister of Munitions reported the result in the following letter:

“MY DEAR CARSON,—I saw Murdoch the Australian yesterday. He struck me as being exceptionally intelligent and sane. That makes the account he gave me of his visit to the Dardanelles much more disquieting. He left on my mind an impression of impending disaster, and he is angry at the ignorance and apparent indifference of the men here who are directing operations. He is specially severe on the Dardanelles Committee. These are two or three of the things he told me:

- (1) He conversed with several officers in high command, and they are all convinced that further progress in the Anzac position is impracticable. They might gain 100 yards here

and 200 yards there at enormous cost, but in the judgment of his informants a substantial advance is out of the question. As Colonel Hankey points out that Anzac is our best chance, Murdoch's report is discouraging.

- (2) The Turks are first class fighting men, ably led.
- (3) They seem to have quite enough ammunition for all practical purposes.
- (4) Even the Australians struck Murdoch as being thoroughly depressed and dispirited by their prospects.
- (5) Sickness is rife owing to flies, the cramped position of the men, the impossibility of getting any exercise. The Australians at the most advanced post are only half a mile from the beach, and at some points they are clinging on to about 10 to 15 yards of cliff. The generals out there informed Murdoch that the army might probably be destroyed by sickness alone.
- (6) The Turks gave him the impression of men who were just playing with our army: who could at any time drive us into the sea, but preferred to keep us there for the present.

"Unfortunately Murdoch has already reported in this sense to the Australian Prime Minister. His letter when it is received there will I feel certain create a sensation. But as I pointed out to him, it will be too late then for action, and I urged him to supply to our Prime Minister a copy of his confidential report to the Commonwealth Premier. This he promised to do. It is our duty to demand its production and circulation. We must also insist on the production of the confidential letter written by Ashmead Bartlett to the Prime Minister—a letter taken from Murdoch at Marseilles on the distinct promise that it would be forwarded to the Prime Minister.

"I agree that Murdoch's report does not differ in essentials from that furnished to us by Colonel Hankey. He simply dots the i's and crosses the t's of some things said by Hankey. Under these circumstances I am afraid what Murdoch told me is true, that unless the Dardanelles Committee immediately reconsider the position in the Gallipoli Peninsula, either with a view to action or evacuation, we shall be held

responsible personally for the disaster. As you know, I always opposed this Gallipoli enterprise, and so have you. I opposed it at the start, and you have opposed it since you joined the Ministry. But we have also agreed that if it was to be proceeded with, it ought to be pressed on with forces which are in some measure adequate to the tremendous character of the operation. I have never thought that success was possible unless the Turkish forces were engaged elsewhere, so as to deprive the Turks of the necessary reinforcements of men and ammunition for the Peninsula.

"Yours sincerely,

"D. LLOYD GEORGE."

Carson, who had no fear of Kitchener or of any man, brought the case put by Murdoch before the Dardanelles Committee.

"Why," said Kitchener, "did Murdoch not come to see me?"

"Because he was afraid of an insolent reception,"<sup>1</sup> said Carson.

From such hot passages it is evident that the difficulties in Cabinet at the beginning had not improved by the end of September. But there was another difference which, even more powerfully than the Dardanelles, drove Carson towards the same decision—in the case of Serbia.

<sup>1</sup> The War Office view of Mr. Murdoch's activities will be found in the *Official History of the War* (Gallipoli, vol. ii., p. 384); "Mr. Murdoch," says Brigadier General Aspinall Oglander, "had also written a letter to the Australian Premier, in the course of which, while cruelly defaming most of the officers and troops (other than Australian) at that time serving on the Peninsula . . . he had delivered a violent attack on the Commander-in-Chief and the Chief of the General Staff. At the suggestion of Mr. Lloyd George he had sent a copy of this letter to the Prime Minister, and Mr. Asquith, though subsequently admitting that many of his allegations were untrue, had taken the unusual step of printing it as a State Paper and circulating it to members of the Government."

## CHAPTER IX

### *Serbia*

Hamilton's despatches - Thoughts of resignation - Sir Henry Craik - Tales of Gallipoli - Serbia - Divided counsels - Bluffed by Bulgaria - Greece - The storm bursts - Kitchener and Grey - Carson resigns.

THE more Carson saw of the conduct of the war the more reason he found for dissatisfaction. He pressed the Secretary of State for War for information, which Lord Kitchener as obstinately withheld. Only on the 9th October, 1915, did he get to the dreadful truth about the Dardanelles. On that day—it was a Saturday—Kitchener took him into his room at the War Office and pointed at a box in the corner. "There," he said, "you will find Johnnie Hamilton's despatches, which you so much want to see. You can spend the week-end over them, and damned unpleasant reading you will find them."

It was thus that Carson made his acquaintance with that terrible story which later he was to pass on to the Dardanelles Commission.

The information only confirmed Carson's disquietude. His direct, energetic and vehement temper had long fretted under the temporising policy of the Prime Minister and the delays and indecisions of a divided Cabinet. On the 16th October, 1915, Mr. Lloyd George reported to a friend that "Carson is sick to death of the eternal talk and policy of drift."<sup>1</sup> Carson saw but one course before him, although others were suggested. One morning he had been invited to breakfast by Mr. Lloyd George and finding at the table evidence of what was afoot, he said plainly: "I am serving under Mr. Asquith as Attorney-General, and as long as I am in that position, I shall join in no intrigue against him. If I find the service intolerable, I shall resign."

We find evidence of this growing distaste in his correspondence. Thus, for example, his old friend, Sir Henry Craik, wrote to him on the 8th October, 1915, expressing "not my

<sup>1</sup> Lord Riddell's *War Diary*, p. 126.

own opinion only; but that of many of our best men, when I say that the Government, from being something which all supported without enthusiasm, is fast becoming something that we regard with distrust and antipathy, and which we can hardly force ourselves to support.

"The new menaces of danger," Craik proceeded, "that are crowding upon us, will quickly drive the nation from sullen distrust to a frenzy of anger." And he went on to hint that Parliament might "break all conventions in order to protest against this murderous and treasonable policy of vacillation and procrastination."

It is not often that a member of a Government gets so frank an opinion from one of its supporters. But Craik spoke for those Conservatives who regarded Carson as almost the only man they could trust in the Coalition.

"I believe," he said, "that our compact of support to the Government has been strained to the breaking point: it may be that our salvation is to come only from a convulsion which, perhaps, might evolve the real leader.

"It is my firm conviction that you," Craik went on, "and perhaps one or two others, might help us. Only give us a rallying cry, and I believe the nation would respond."

The letter suggests a desperate anxiety, a profound mistrust, and that Carson shared these feelings we perceive through the discreet terms of his reply.

"MY DEAR CRAIK," he wrote (on the 9th October, 1915), "I do not at all resent your letter—and I know that it has been prompted by nothing but patriotic feelings. You will of course understand that it is impossible for me to say anything of what I learn as a Cabinet Minister; but I can assure you that the present state of affairs and the resentment of the public at our want of success is never absent from my mind; and I do, and am prepared to do, everything regardless of any consequences to my own position.

"That, I have no doubt you will readily assent to, but more I cannot say for the moment.

"Yours very sincerely,

"EDWARD CARSON."

There were, as we have seen, both general and particular reasons for this discontent. The vital question of conscription remained in a state of almost intolerable suspense, while from every field of war came tidings of defeat or disaster. One dreadful letter Carson probably received on the same day as he wrote to Craik. It was from an old Dublin friend, Frederick Wrench, who wrote (on the 8th October, 1915) to convey the truth about Gallipoli which he had heard from that front.

After a severe comment on the conduct of the expedition by Sir Ian Hamilton, Wrench proceeded—

"... Stopford and others have been made the scapegoats. Stopford obeyed orders and did all that was possible to do; but there were no guns at first, and half the guns never turned up, and, for the Saturday and Sunday, there was no water, with a temperature of 103 in the shade, and men became delirious from thirst and were actually drinking their own urine.<sup>1</sup>

"We have heard a great deal about piers being built but most of the concrete blocks with which it was intended to build them have been blown into dust by Turkish guns.

"The Turks fight magnificently and are the best of fellows when captured. They have five lines of trenches while we have only one line weakly held.

"It seems impossible that we can get through or even get away without heavy loss, though if any feat of arms is possible to human beings, the Australians would be the men to accomplish it. Their heroism is beyond description. This may be all stale news to you, but I did not like not to pass it on, especially as it is apparently known to a good many of the Nationalists here from their wounded friends and I hear that Redmond is greatly exercised about it.

"I cannot say how thankful many of us are that you are in the War Council, and I can only hope that everything is going the best with you. . . ."

Things were so far from "going the best" with Carson that

<sup>1</sup> See Report of Dardanelles Commission. Sir Frederick Stopford was relieved of his command on 15th August, 1915, but he was vindicated by the report, in which it was stated that Sir Ian Hamilton had wrongly paraphrased Stopford's orders, and thus given a false impression of events on the disastrous 8th of August; that Hamilton had made "injudicious" changes in Stopford's plans and ordered a night attack without adequate reconnaissance.



three days later he was to write to the Prime Minister proposing to resign his office. As we have seen, many discontents contributed to that decision. Mr. Winston Churchill is not entirely accurate in saying that "Sir Edward Carson resigned because of the failure to rescue Serbia, and M. Delcassé because of the attempt." Serbia, nevertheless, being the occasion, we must now consider the case of Serbia.

It was a case long in doubt and by that time desperate. The Serbian armies were brave and well led. In the summer and autumn of 1914 they had repulsed an Austrian invasion; but an epidemic of typhus in the winter and the lack of men and munitions left them in no state to face a second invasion in the spring of 1915. The Allies, certainly, were anxious to help them; but being desperately engaged on the Western Front, could spare neither the men nor the munitions. Mr. Lloyd George, indeed, who was equal to every difficulty, proposed to withdraw the Expeditionary Force from France and transport it to the Balkans, where it was to join the armies of Serbia, Greece and Roumania in a grand attack upon Austria. Nor was he in the least convinced by those stupid and bigoted "generals" who argued that in such a case France would be obliged to make peace with Germany and that Germany would occupy the Channel ports.

Mr. Asquith notes in his Diary that on the 7th, 8th and 18th January, 1915, the War Council made three days' survey of the troops available, and decided that Kitchener was right: there were no troops available. As Kitchener said in his laconic way, they had to make war as they must, not as they would.

Nevertheless, the case of Serbia was pressing: on the 21st January, 1915, Mr. Asquith noted that "the main point at the moment was to do something really effective for Serbia, which is threatened by an overwhelming inrush from the Austrians, assisted by some 80,000 Germans." On the 31st January it was proposed to send two divisions, and a curious bargain was struck with General Joffre, who wanted every man in France: he was to have the two divisions on the understanding that he would let them go at the end of March.

There was an evident conflict between soldiers and statesmen, for Mr. Asquith speaks of it as "one of the cases where policy

overrides mere strategy." Mr. Lloyd George's head was seething with brilliant strategic conceptions; but M. Millerand, called in for consultation, made the sage and tactful remark that "un plan mediocre bien arrêté vaut mieux que de changer souvent de plan," and added, "il ne faut pas encombrer nos généraux de suggestions."

These cautions, certainly, were not superfluous, for while Mr. Lloyd George was proposing adventures in the Balkans and in Syria, Sir Herbert Samuel was patriotically pressing for an invasion of Palestine. By the middle of February, however, the shifting hopes of the politicians had taken another direction. "Our Serbian *démarche* is off for the moment," Mr. Asquith notes, "... our eyes are now fixed on the Dardanelles."

There being no troops to spare for Serbia, the statesmen were of a mind to try diplomacy. "If only these heartbreaking Balkan States could be drawn into action," Mr. Asquith confides to his Diary, "the trick could be done with the greatest of ease." Mr. Lloyd George was again equal to the occasion. On the 20th February, 1915, Mr. Asquith notes, "Lloyd George is anxious to go out as a kind of extra-Ambassador and Emissary to visit Russia and the Balkan States, and try to bring them in." But, as we are not surprised to hear, Sir Edward Grey was "dead opposed to anything of the kind."

In war, diplomacy depends upon arms, and the Allies, having no arms to offer, could do but little with promises. Greece was, indeed, bound to help Serbia by Treaty, but thought it unreasonable to honour an agreement in circumstances unforeseen when it was made. Even M. Venizelos, who most favoured the cause of the Allies, refused, as he said, to add the suicide of Greece to the ruin of Serbia. Greece was prepared to fight only upon the condition that the Allies supplied a force of 800,000 men to guarantee her northern provinces against Bulgaria, and the Allies, not having 800,000 men to spare, tried to buy Bulgaria with promises. They offered her the Dobrudja at the expense of Roumania, Macedonia at the expense of Serbia, and the towns of Cavalla, Drama, and Seres at the expense of Greece. M. Radoslavoff, the Bulgarian Prime Minister, was careful to inform his neighbours of these offers made at their expense.

The Allies appear to have laboured under a strange hallucination about Bulgaria and hoped for her support when she was already committed to the Central Powers. And so it came about that even in July 1915, when French aeroplanes reported a concentration in Hungary, and Serbia appealed for aid to the Allies, she was told to look for help to Sofia, and even when the Bulgarian Army was being mobilised, and Serbia proposed to strike at it before mobilisation was complete, M. Pashitch was warned that he would break the peace of the Balkans at his peril. Although they had been told many times of her intentions by her neighbours, it was not until Bulgaria was ready to strike that the truth dawned upon the Allied Governments, and then it was too late.<sup>1</sup>

Thus it came about that on the 28th September, 1915, Sir Edward Grey made the following statement in the House of Commons:

"My official information from the Bulgarian Government is that they have taken up a position of armed neutrality to defend their rights and independence and that they have no aggressive intentions whatever against Bulgaria's neighbours." And then, after testifying to "a warm feeling of sympathy for the Bulgarian people," the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs hinted at a dawning suspicion.

"If on the other hand," he said, "the Bulgarian mobilisation were to result in Bulgaria assuming an aggressive attitude on the side of the enemies we are prepared to give to our friends in the Balkans all the support in our power, in the manner that would be most welcome to them, in concert with our Allies, without reserve and without qualification. . . ."<sup>2</sup>

"All the support in our power"—Sir Edward Carson supposed the Government and himself to be bound by that pledge. Moreover, "I believed," he said afterwards, "that our military advisers never would have allowed us to make that declaration unless we had actual preparations and plans."

Lord Kitchener was occupied with other things and had more urgent demands to meet. Throughout the year the Russian

<sup>1</sup> See especially *The Allied Secret Service in Greece*, by Sir Basil Thomson, K.C.B., and *Through the Serbian Campaign*, by Gordon Gordon-Smith.

<sup>2</sup> H. of C. Official Report, 28th September, 1915, vol. lxxiv., c. 732.

Armies had been suffering a series of heavy disasters, and their case was desperate. To ease the pressure on their Allies in the East, and to liberate their northern provinces, the French had prepared a grand attack and the long swaying battle along the Western Front grew to one of its intense climaxes in the autumn of 1915. Greece was prepared to come to the help of Serbia even if the Allies could provide only 150,000 men; but the French were fully occupied in Artois and Champagne, and the British were no less desperately engaged between Lens and the La Bassée Canal. Sir Ian Hamilton passionately protested that he was himself besieged on his strip of beach when it was proposed to send two of his divisions to Salonika. On the 25th September, Bulgaria ordered a general mobilisation. M. Venizelos was prepared to risk everything on intervention; but the King of the Hellenes refused his assent, and forced his Prime Minister out of office. On the 5th October, 1915, despite a vote of confidence from the Chamber, Venizelos resigned. The King and the General Staff, with more knowledge of things military and more prudence than the politicians, considered that to send the Greek Army to the North in the support of Serbia was too risky an operation. The new Greek Government proclaimed an armed neutrality.

On the 9th October, 1915, the storm burst upon the Balkans. Mackensen crossed the Danube with nine German and Austrian divisions—raw troops in the main but well supported with artillery. Two days later the Bulgarians invaded Serbia from the East and under this double and converging attack what remained of the Serbian Army was driven into the mountains of Albania.

The British Government meanwhile hesitated between the rival claims of Serbia and Gallipoli. On the 11th October a joint Staff Conference decided in favour of Gallipoli against the Balkans, and the same day the Dardanelles Committee of the Cabinet decided against going further with the despatch of troops to Salonika. On the 12th it undertook to provide 200,000 men by the 1st of January, 1916, on the condition that Greece and Roumania declared war at once upon the Central Powers. It was eventually decided, by a characteristic compromise, to send a force to Egypt, so that it might be available for

whatever destination these distracted counsels might at last determine.

It was already too late: the outcome of these vacillations was a force which arrived in Salonika like *la moutarde après le dîner*.

This crisis in the war was reflected in the *camera obscura* of the Cabinet. According to Mr. Lloyd George, Lord Kitchener did not know that the Germans had crossed the Danube for twenty hours after the news had reached the War Office, and in support of his charge, he reproduces a note passed to him in Cabinet by Sir Edward Carson:

"K. does not read the telegrams—and we don't see them—it is intolerable. E. C."

Mr. Lloyd George adds that "K. did not express the least surprise that he had not seen the telegram." No doubt the Secretary of State for War felt that as he could not help the Serbs there was little to be gained, in a practical way, by debating the case.

Sir Edward Carson was less phlegmatic. He felt the impending ruin of Serbia as a stain upon the honour and good faith of his country. When he asked the Secretary of State for War what steps had been taken to make good the words of Sir Edward Grey, Lord Kitchener replied: "I have not even seen a map of Serbia."

"Then," Carson burst out in a rage, "if we can take no steps to save them, we ought at least to let them know, so that they can make what peace they can with their enemies."

Sir Edward Grey made the cold comment that this would be unwise as the Serbians were at least engaging the Armies of the enemy which would otherwise be liberated for use elsewhere—a decision against which the warm heart of Carson revolted.

*The Times* of the 11th October reported a rumour that Sir Edward Carson had resigned, which has "caused intense excitement in the House of Commons," and had "only been set at rest by the direct denial of Sir Edward Carson himself." Rumour, however, with her hundred mouths, had only anticipated the truth. On the morning of that day, just before he left home, a box arrived from the War Office with the General Staff's report on the situation. They insisted that it was too late to get our troops through in time. "When I get home,"

Carson said to Mr. Pembroke Wicks, his secretary, "I shall no longer be a member of the Government if they abide by this report and do not stand by Serbia." On the 12th of October, 1915, Sir Edward Carson tendered his resignation in two letters to the Prime Minister.

## CHAPTER X

### *Resignation*

Mr. Asquith's appeal - Walter Long - Delays - Walter Long again - Ronald McNeill - The announcement - A stout-hearted companion.

ON Tuesday, the 12th October, 1915, began a very curious crisis, precipitated, no doubt, by the premature report in *The Times*. In the morning Carson wrote a short letter to the Prime Minister, announcing his decision and promising an explanation, which he himself delivered at 10 Downing Street before twelve o'clock. That same morning he saw Mr. Lloyd George, who had himself written a memorandum which was an attack on the War Office.

"You are doing absolutely the right thing," Mr. Lloyd George said to Carson, "and I hope you will not think me a coward because I don't do the same."

"No one that knows you," said Carson, "would ever think you a coward."

As for the Prime Minister he must have been dismayed by Carson's letter. Differences apart, there had been a kindly feeling between the two men, who respected and even liked each other. It was, besides, both a heavy blow to himself and to the Government and might even have sounded in his ears a note of impending doom. Mr. Asquith must have known or suspected that at least two of his colleagues, Lloyd George and Bonar Law, were meditating similar action and that if they went there were others who could not remain. The danger being imminent, the reply was immediate, it reached Carson shortly after twelve o'clock.

"*Confidential.*

10 Downing Street,  
"Whitehall, S.W.

"12th October, 1915.

"MY DEAR CARSON,—Of course I will await your further letter; but I beg most earnestly to appeal to you to reconsider your decision both on personal and public grounds.

"Yours very sincerely,

"H. H. ASQUITH."

In the meanwhile Carson was dictating to his secretary (Mr. Pembroke Wicks) the longer letter which he afterwards copied out in his own hand before sending it to the Prime Minister. In the middle of this task he was called out to see Bonar Law.

Bonar Law, like Lloyd George, had written or was about to write a memorandum; but like Lloyd George did not intend to resign, and was "inclined to be hurt" because of Carson's precipitation.

As they were both of his way of thinking, Carson might also have been "inclined to be hurt." "It seems a pity," Mr. Pembroke Wicks noted in his Diary for that day, "that Carson should have to bear the whole brunt of resigning and not Bonar Law or Lloyd George; but I think he feels the dishonesty more than they do, and would not stay in on any conditions in such circumstances."

Carson returned to his letter, but before he had finished it sent for Ronald McNeill. "I must confide in someone," he said, "I trust his judgment." The massive Ulsterman came along in response to the summons; to express, when he heard the case, complete agreement with the line Carson was taking; but Carson's mind was already made up.

Next day Carson finished his writing, saw Bonar Law and had luncheon with Mr. Lloyd George. Then he sent his second letter, which was in explanation of his first, and strolled into the smoking-room of the House of Commons, where rumour was already busy with his name. In the meantime Mr. Asquith was working like a beaver to restore the broken dam. The Foreign Office offered a military convention to Roumania and Greece, which was a reversal of the decision of the War Council, and the Cabinet was busily debating conscription.

On the 14th, Carson wrote to the Prime Minister asking him to announce the resignation; but Bonar Law persuaded him to hold his hand, at least until the matter was reconsidered in Cabinet on the morrow, and the letter was not sent.

The Prime Minister, evidently, was bringing everything and everyone to bear upon Carson, to whom he wrote again on Thursday the 14th:

"I have received and carefully read your second letter. I don't know whether you have seen the telegrams which were



sent on Tuesday night to Roumania and Greece. In any case I would strongly urge upon you not to make the resignation definitive until there has been a Cabinet decision, in which you cannot bring yourself to acquiesce. The Cabinet meets to-morrow morning."

Mr. Asquith was not alone in his endeavours; it is obvious he had gone where help was most likely to be useful and had enlisted Carson's friends in the task of persuasion. Bonar Law was one; the President of the Local Government Board another. That day Walter Long wrote to Carson:

"MY DEAR NED,—Thank you for your confidence. I implore you to reconsider and await discussion in, and decision by, the Cabinet.

"You can't justify your resignation on the recommendation of a Committee: you could not explain it: silence, on the other hand, would lead to every kind of report and rumour. Your resignation will be a fatal blow to the Government. If it is forced by the decision of the Cabinet after *full debate* and *warning* there is, and can be, no help for it, but if it takes place because you disapprove of a policy which has not been before the Cabinet it seems to me that your responsibility for the consequences would be a very grave one.

"I am not thinking of Governments, of Parties, of persons, I am thinking solely of the war, and the awful crisis by which our country is confronted, and I pray you by the memory of your great sacrifices and your splendid services in the past, not to resign before it is quite evident that if you remain you will be called upon to share in a responsibility for a policy which you believe will be fatal to your country's honour and existence.

"That moment has not yet come. Forgive me.

"Yours affectionately,

"WALTER H. LONG."

Carson, positive and resolute as his habit was, hesitated under the force of these appeals. He spent some part of Thursday (the 14th) with Bonar Law; but went neither to the House of Commons that day nor to the Cabinet the next. Questions to the Attorney-General in Parliament were being answered by the

Solicitor-General. The Lobby gossips talked of nothing else. What was going on? Nobody knew, yet all were aware of conflict and of crisis.

If Carson hesitated, Asquith delayed. "I gather," Mr. Pembroke Wicks noted on Saturday the 16th, "that Carson is not disposed to make any further move in the next few days in view of the possibility of a complete split and thinks that if half the Cabinet are going to resign it would be useless for him to resign now or to come back for just a few days. . . . Asquith seems to be treating him in a queer sort of way. The original letter of resignation was sent in on Tuesday and the fuller explanation the next day, and yet it has not been discussed by the Cabinet. If we lose this war Asquith's capacity for procrastination will be the main cause."

That day Carson heard again from the Prime Minister.

"*Confidential.*

10 Downing Street,

"Whitehall, S.W.

"16th October, 1915.

"MY DEAR CARSON,—I have had no reply to my last letter to you, and I regretted that you did not feel it possible to attend yesterday's Cabinet.

"I hope that you will keep your resignation in suspense at any rate until after Monday's Cabinet, when we shall arrive at a conclusion as to what our attitude is to be in regard to compulsion. I should, of course, be glad if you would attend our meeting.

"Yours very sincerely,

"H. H. A."

On Sunday the 17th another attempt, again by the hand of Walter Long, was made to sway Carson's suspended judgment. In a letter of seven type-written pages his old friend put every argument that friendship could urge or policy could suggest. The letter is so closely argued and throws so much light on the state of mind of the Government that it must be given at length.

"*Confidential.*

17th October, 1915.

"MY DEAR NED,—

"... What I really wanted to convey to you was my

belief that the resignation at this moment of so important a Member of the Cabinet as yourself will strike a vital blow at the Government, and that unless it were possible to make your position perfectly clear, beyond all doubt, it would cause great consternation in the Country which might easily lead to paralysis of our power of government at what I regard as being the most critical moment in our history.

“ I agree cordially with every word you say. We have striven with all our might to alter things but except in a very few respects we have not succeeded, owing to the extraordinary methods of the Prime Minister and the singular but, as I regard it, very clumsy subtlety of K. I don't think, however, we have failed altogether in regard to National Service and the provision of an adequate Army. The National Register is an enormous step in advance. I don't think it would have been possible to get the men, by either voluntary or compulsory methods, without the assistance which we have now got from the Register. Then undoubtedly we have secured more general consultation in the Cabinet, and some little improvement in policy; but in neither of these results can we claim complete satisfaction, and the position to-day is, I agree with you, as bad and serious as it can possibly be. But how do we stand at the moment? I am afraid that we are acting, perhaps unconsciously, with undue precipitation in regard to Compulsion. We have had very few opportunities in which to consider our action—so far as I am concerned I have had only one consultation with my colleagues—we are taking the gravest steps which men can take, grave and serious enough in time of peace, but a million times more grave in a time of war; and are we taking a course which is likely to result in the remedy that we desire?

“ By far the most important questions of the moment are (1) the situation in Gallipoli; (2) what aid we are to give to Serbia. In regard to the first I gather that we are in complete accord. I have already told the Members of the Dardanelles Committee that nothing will induce me to give my sanction to sending more troops to share the fate of those gallant fellows who have been so ruthlessly sacrificed on the Peninsula.

and I am in favour, as I have definitely told Winston and others, of a withdrawal of our forces even if this means the loss of a considerable proportion of them, for I believe the choice is between the loss of some now or of the whole later on, and at no very distant date.

“As regards Serbia: I am at one with you absolutely as to our being bound in honour to do everything *that we can* to help her, but I am not quite sure whether I agree with you as to the course we ought to take. I am told on all hands that both Naval and Military opinion concur in the view that it would be out of the question to send a force up into Northern Serbia, for two reasons: (1) that it could not get there in time; (2) that it would be cut off from all supplies owing to the insufficiency of railway communication, and that probably it would never be heard of again. The alternative proposal to land a force somewhere in the neighbourhood of Dedea-gatch is also condemned by the same authorities—by the Naval because of the difficulties of landing; by the Military because of the concentration of Turkish and Bulgarian troops, which would make it impossible for any but a very large force to do anything effective or to be able to save itself. Therefore, what I desire to ask you, and what I should like to discuss with you, is: can we arrive at some definite proposal for the relief of Serbia? If we can, and if we are able to secure the support of our Naval and Military advisers, I am prepared at any sacrifice to insist upon it.

“With regard to the general situation at the moment, I should value your advice more than I can describe if you would tell me what your view is as to our immediate action. Asquith, as we all know, is a most consummate advocate. He has got a fairly good case and he will certainly make the best of it. His note to the Cabinet yesterday is proof of this. The Country would, I believe, view with horror any steps which lead to the immediate break-up of the Government, and I am convinced that we should find it very difficult to defend ourselves from the charge which Asquith would bring against us: that, while he had endeavoured to meet us—(and he would prove, notwithstanding all you and I know to the contrary, to the satisfaction of a vast number of people in the

Country that this is the case) we had insisted upon steps which forced the catastrophe.

"I know better probably than most people, certainly as well as anybody, what a rare combination of courage and prudence you possess, and I am appealing to you as a personal friend and, if I may say so, a very dear one, to help me at the moment when the position is probably graver and more difficult than any with which any statesmen have ever been confronted.

"With reference to what you tell me about K. I am not surprised, but I am very indignant. I think he is treating us very badly, worse even than I thought in the light of what you tell me.

"I am sending this letter to your house to-night in the hope that it might be possible for us to meet if only for a few minutes before the Meeting at Curzon's house to-morrow. I shall be at home by 10 o'clock to-night (Victoria 6797), and will obey any summons you are good enough to send me. At the worst, could I not come to your house and go down with you to the meeting to-morrow, possibly having ten minutes with you beforehand?

"Yours affectionately,

"WALTER H. LONG."

Another friend wrote Carson that day, and in an exactly opposite sense; it was Ronald McNeill, whose letter must also be set down verbatim:

"18 Cadogan Place, S.W.

"*Sunday.*

"MY DEAR CHIEF,—I am sure that even if you think it worthless you will not resent what I am going to say as impertinence.

"The more I have thought over it the more earnestly I hope that you will not for any consideration whatever allow the doubt as to your position to remain open over to-morrow, and that you will think it right to send a note *to-night* to the P.M. saying that you intend to make the fact of your resignation known to the Press to-morrow afternoon. No one knows

so well as you the P.M.'s genius for procrastination and he is sure to find some plausible reason for further postponement, even although *six days* will have elapsed since your first letter to him, and the wonderment of the public began. I am extremely apprehensive lest your loyal anxiety to keep in close line with your *friends* should lead you to allow the continuance of a situation which is already exciting misrepresentation. If either old or new colleagues, for good reason or bad, induce you to prolong delay and doubt, I am afraid lest the supreme usefulness which you may and should be to the Country will be seriously impaired by an appearance of indecision entirely alien to your character, at the moment when promptitude and decision are of vital import, and every hour is full of destiny.

"Yours affectionately,

"RONALD McNEILL."

Carson, weighing one letter against the other, may have thought that the advice of the Ulsterman was more disinterested. That night he wrote to the Prime Minister asking him to make the resignation known; otherwise Carson must himself announce it in the House. To this Mr. Asquith replied on the Monday:

"*Confidential.*

10 Downing Street,

"Whitehall, S.W.

"18th October, 1915.

"MY DEAR CARSON,--I have your letter of yesterday and note with much regret that you do not see your way to withdraw your resignation.

"I think before you make any public announcement you should see the King and explain your position to him.

"I shall be very glad to talk to you at the House as to what you are to say there.

"I can only add that I have valued your services as a colleague very highly, and that I part from you in hearty sorrow and with real friendship.

"Yours sincerely,

"H. H. ASQUITH."

The news, however, was already out. That morning the Political Notewriter of *The Times* had given more than a hint of it. "No resignation," he wrote, "is tolerable at this stage except in a man who has foreseen a long series of blunders into which the want of a policy has led us, and has striven to warn his colleagues and has failed. That, we must assume, is the case of Sir Edward Carson whose continued absence from the Cabinet Councils has been the subject of much comment." That morning Carson attended a meeting of the "Conscription Members of the Cabinet" at Lord Curzon's house, and found them still undecided. Conscripting they thought "an unsuitable thing to go out on"; but "they all wished they had followed his example and gone out on the Balkan question." They added that "the only thing was to scrap the present machine and start afresh, as the joint effect of Asquith and Kitchener was to paralyse all effective action." So Mr. Pembroke Wicks noted in his Diary. The announcement was still delayed. That night, evidently in reply to a message, Carson had a note from Mr. Asquith's private secretary, Maurice Bonham Carter. The Prime Minister was not well; he had gone to bed with a severe headache and was asleep; but he had expressed the wish that Carson should see the King. Would it not, in these circumstances, be right to postpone any announcement until the morrow evening?

But either Carson or the Press made an end of these delays.

On Tuesday the 19th the announcement sent a shudder of dismay through the nation. "Sir Edward Carson's resignation," *The Times* reported the following day, "has for the moment overshadowed every other topic of discussion in the world of politics." Sir Edward Carson had not been at the House of Commons, and as the Prime Minister was absent it was probable that explanations would be delayed until his return. In a leading article *The Times* described the resignation as "a political event of the first magnitude—none the less because for the moment it seems likely to stand alone." And *The Times* went on to say that while he might be right or wrong on the issue, no one who knew him, and least of all his late colleagues in the Cabinet, would attribute any motive to Sir Edward Carson but the most complete conviction that resignation was the only honest course.

We get some more intimate glimpses in the Diaries of those days. "Kitchener," Wilson writes (on the 21st October, 1915), "is frightened of Egypt, of India, of Mesopotamia, of going on in the Dardanelles, of coming away, of going to Salonika and of not going. He has no plan of any sort. Carson came to see me after lunch, and told me the whole story of his resignation. Absolute chaos and indecision reign in the Cabinet, all due to Asquith, who has now gone to bed to gain some more time."

Lord Beaverbrook, in his *Politicians and the War*, gives it as his opinion that "resignations in echelon, like attacks, are always a mistake. Carson should have held on and helped Bonar Law to fight for evacuation in the Dardanelles." Lord Riddell records a conversation on the subject with Lord Northcliffe (again on the 21st). "'This Government,' said Northcliffe, 'will be out in three months. It will be succeeded by a Committee of Safety comprising perhaps five leading men. Later they will probably be turned out and then there will be a revolution. When the story of the Gallipoli campaign is published the public will be aghast. Carson will probably state the case. He is an able man. . . . He is a stout-hearted fellow.'

"'Have you any message for Lloyd George?' Lord Riddell then asked, and Northcliffe replied, 'No, I was talking to him on the telephone last night, but you can tell him he will be one of the five, and that he will find Carson a stout-hearted companion.'"

It was not Northcliffe alone who held these views. "The Chief told me to-day," Mr. Pembroke Wicks noted on the 22nd October, 1915, "that the Cabinet have decided to memorialise Asquith, who is still away ill, to the effect that the whole war policy should be dictated by a small Committee."

The resignation of Sir Edward Carson was the first move in a reform or revolt which was not to come to a head for another year.



## CHAPTER XI

### *The Question Debated*

Carson in the House - Mr. Asquith - His defence - Carson replies - Carson's letter - The point at issue - Sir Edward Grey - Serbia.

WE may note in the circumstances of the resignation the unwillingness of the Prime Minister (and Mr. Bonar Law) to part with the Attorney-General, and the efforts made on both sides to soften the shock of the event. Thus although Sir Edward Carson wrote to the Prime Minister on the 12th October, 1915, giving at length "the reasons which have compelled me to the view that I could not support the conclusion come to at the War Council of the Cabinet yesterday," and that, therefore, "being in entire disagreement with them," he could "neither honourably nor usefully continue to take part in the deliberations of the Government," it was not until the 20th that the fact was made known to the House of Commons. "The late Attorney-General," it was noted by the Political Correspondent of *The Times*, "was received with prolonged and sympathetic cheers which were not confined to one side of the House." If, however, "there were any who expected a sensational statement, they were disappointed." In the absence of the Prime Minister, Carson made a brief statement obviously intended to mollify the blow. There had been no political difference, nor "one word on those party questions which divided us before the war," nor had there been "any personal difference either with the Prime Minister—whose unvarying courtesy I desire to acknowledge—nor with any one of my late colleagues." He had resigned on questions of policy, upon which he pretended no superior wisdom, but felt very strongly, and, as he hoped the House would believe, "conscientiously and patriotically." "Sir Edward Carson's restrained and moving statement," the journalist remarked, "has greatly strengthened his position in the House of Commons. He is by far the most commanding figure there

outside the swollen ranks of the Government. Members are awaiting the next phase of Sir Edward Carson's career with the deepest interest."

The case had more fully to be explained, and the explanation came when the Prime Minister returned to the House, on the 2nd November, 1915. Upon Mr. Asquith, at that time, all the suspicions, fears and anger of an alarmed and almost desperate public were concentrated. The temporising of years seemed to have accumulated all their arrears in compound vengeance upon that single head. His "wait and see" had long been a catchword and a powerful Press attributed every misfortune to those politic delays which were ascribed to indolence or indecision. Mr. Asquith had some reason to believe that these attacks were directed or encouraged by one of his own colleagues, for gossip coupled the names of Lord Northcliffe and the Minister of Munitions. Some time before (on the 29th March, 1915) he had given Mr. Lloyd George a broad hint of his knowledge of the intrigue, and had listened, with more indulgence than conviction, to vehemently passionate denials.<sup>1</sup> Yet attacks and rumours continued and the more the storm grew in fury and concentration, the more must these uncomfortable doubts have obtruded themselves upon the not altogether unsophisticated mind of the old statesman. Carson, at all events, he could not suspect: there, as he knew well, the motive was public and the difference was open. Yet from Carson came this heaviest of blows at that most critical of times. And so again we see Mr. Asquith squaring his shoulders, after his old habit, taking responsibility for his colleagues, putting the best face on the worst situation.

They had done great things: there were not far short of a million men under Sir John French, besides other contingents elsewhere; the Dominions had rallied to the flag; the Grand Fleet was doing its silent work; there had been "an important and highly successful campaign in Mesopotamia."

Mr. Asquith never blamed the soldier for the mistakes of the statesman. As for the Dardanelles, "in a great war like this you cannot determine your policy or your course of action entirely and exclusively by military and naval considerations.

<sup>1</sup> Lord Oxford and Asquith, *Memories and Reflections, 1852-1927*, vol. II., p. 70.

... Sometimes it is necessary—not only expedient but necessary—to run risks and encounter dangers which purely naval or military policy would warn them against.”

They might by success have “solved the whole situation in the Balkans,” laid open the capital of the Turkish Empire, brought success to Russia, “throughout the whole of the Eastern world,” victory in the Dardanelles would have been “acclaimed as the most brilliant and conclusive demonstration of the superiority of the Allies.” They had, however, failed (as is apt to happen in campaigns made without regard to naval and military considerations). They had failed: “I have never sustained a keener disappointment than in the failure of this operation.”

As to the Balkans, the Germans had basely bought Bulgaria; the King of the Hellenes had refused to support M. Venizelos; but there had been consultations between the General Staffs of the British and the French Armies, to the end of co-operation, “close, cordial and in full concert,” and “Serbia may be assured, as far as I am able to do so, and I give her that assurance on the part of the British Government to-day, that her independence is regarded by us as one of the essential objects of the Allied Powers.”

Then the Prime Minister touched on that sore and delicate point of National Service. He would let the House, for once, into a Cabinet secret. So many things had been said and written of what went on in the Cabinet——”

“Some of them true,” Carson interjected.

“Very few,” the Prime Minister replied. Nevertheless, there had been differences amongst the members of the Cabinet “as to whether . . . what I call the full exploitation and employment of the recruitable reservoir can or cannot be obtained without resort to some form of conscription.” It was to him a “pure question of practical expediency. . . . Compulsion, if resorted to, ought only to be resorted to, and can only from a practical point of view be resorted to—or, in other words, be made a workable expedient for filling up the gap which you have to supply—with something in the nature of general consent.”

It was Mr. Asquith’s way of saying that they would have conscription as soon as he could get agreement in his Cabinet.

And here, like a tongue of flame from this pleonastic slagheap, an ejaculation sprang from the heart of the Yorkshireman:

"I am determined—I stick at nothing—I am determined that we shall win this war."

But then followed a defence of the Cabinet system which left the House cold. That twenty Ministers should be responsible for the military conduct of the war might seem anomalous; but, for himself, he could see no numerical specific against either want of foresight or want of good luck. He was, however, prepared to agree to a Committee of not less than three and not more than five in number, for the strategic conduct of the war, although he was "very jealous of the maintenance of collective Cabinet responsibility for large changes and new departures in policy."

And then in a peroration, which still, in the pages of Hansard, wrings the heart of the reader, the old Liberal statesman promised on his part, and exhorted his countrymen, to "endure to the end."<sup>1</sup> It was evident that the Prime Minister had braced himself to this great effort, but the spell had lost its power. "The fact," *The Times* noted, "that Mr. Asquith spoke for two hours does not entirely explain a rather universal failure to carry his audience with him all the time. The House of Commons has evidently passed the stage at which a speech from Mr. Asquith could always be trusted to disarm the Opposition."

It was to this speech that Sir Edward Carson—once again, if not in form, the real Leader of the Opposition—rose to reply. He spoke sombrely, as he felt, of the situation after fifteen months of war, of the vast sacrifices of men, of material, of treasure, of the enemy in possession of Belgium, part of France, Poland—"threatening within a very short time to crush our gallant little Ally Serbia"; of the countless numbers dead, wounded and stricken by disease—a position altogether of grave peril. He gave voice to the desire for free debate—"not in consequence of any weakening of any single man in this House and in the country on the main object of the war," but from an anxiety as to whether what appeared to be grave miscalculations could have been avoided, as to whether our resources in men and material are being used to the best advantage—"and

<sup>1</sup> Parl. Deb., H. of C., 2nd November, 1915, vol. lxxv., cc. 508-29.

thirdly, above all, whether the machinery of Government for carrying on the war is the most adequate and effective that we can devise."

The country was groping in the dark and here Carson expressed again a robust political faith in the British people. "For my own part, I have a strong view that our country never fights so well, or so readily makes sacrifices, as when it understands the whole situation, and when with its back to the wall, if necessary, it determines at all costs to surmount these difficulties."

He did not want to dwell on mistakes; he wanted to get at the "root cause," and he proceeded to diagnose the trouble:

"... in my opinion, a Cabinet however useful in time of peace, is an organisation and machine utterly incapable of carrying on a war under present conditions."

Then Carson went on to illustrate his point by the example of the Dardanelles, "which has hung round our neck like a millstone throughout the whole of these recent months," and fixed on what the Prime Minister had said, "that the Cabinet had very often to determine questions exclusive of naval and military considerations."

How far was that "general proposition" to be pushed? Did it mean that, if he had not a reasonable chance of success, he would still undertake an operation like the Dardanelles for reasons outside military and naval considerations? "If that is so I think it is a vice of Cabinet Government."

An expedition which had cost some 100,000 men in casualties, "and suffering which baffles description"—could it be justified unless they were assured by their naval and military advisers that there was the probability of success?

Carson traced remorselessly the miscalculations which had sprung from this initial neglect of expert opinion—first the miscalculation as regards the naval expedition; then as regards the landing of troops, "where you lost in casualties 40,000 men and had an entirely insufficient force to enable you to go on"; the later miscalculation of Suvla Bay, "where you had another 40,000 casualties and your expedition not advanced a single mile towards a successful conclusion."

"From that day to this, when that disaster occurred—a disaster in my opinion the most vital that has happened in the course of this war—under your Cabinet system you have never been able to make up your mind, and you have not now made up your mind . . . as to whether you ought or are able either to proceed with these operations or whether you ought boldly to withdraw your men and save the suffering and the loss which goes on from day to day with absolutely no hope of any satisfactory result."

A Cabinet in peace-time was a microcosm of the House, as the House was of the country, and might be the best form of Government under a popular and party system; but "spasmodic meetings of the Cabinet and debate are absolutely fruitless in carrying on a war." "What was wanted was a small number of competent men—the smaller the better—sitting not once a week, but from day to day, with the best expert advisers they could get, working out the problems that arose."

Carson spoke from his actual experience:

"You want the best military staff you can get, and so far as I could see, when I went to the Cabinet and up till very recently, there was no staff at all, or at least I never saw their productions."

Carson went on to describe how, when the war began, the Staff at the War Office "all went off to carry on the war on the Continent and so the Staff was depleted . . . which I believe has greatly accounted for all the various miscalculations that have happened since the war broke out."

Carson then examined Mr. Asquith's proposal to make a Committee of three to five accountable to the Cabinet. It would only mean, he said, that they would be back to the same system: ". . . if you are a Member of the Cabinet either . . . you must be satisfied to be a nonentity . . . or you must get exactly the same information and go through exactly the same reasoning and sifting which your Committee of three or five have done." "I do not believe," he went on, "in a Committee of the Cabinet, then a Cabinet, and then an inner Cabinet and that is what we have had."

As an alternative, Carson advised the Prime Minister to "concentrate the responsibility upon the best small Cabinet (of five or six) that he can choose."



SIR EDWARD CARSON AND THE RT. HON. A. J. BALFOUR

These considerations brought the speaker to "the gravest and most recent instance of how Cabinet Government worked"—the situation in the Balkans, which had been "staring them in the face certainly ever since I went into the Cabinet and long before." Here he quoted the statement made by Sir Edward Grey on the 28th September, "which he made as the considered policy of the Government and . . . no doubt with the full knowledge of the military adviser of the Government." Carson believed he was a party to it, but he believed more:

"I believed that our military advisers never would have allowed us to make that declaration unless we had actual preparations and plans which were ready when the moment came to enable us to strike and assist our gallant little Ally in the field of battle.

"What must have been the feelings of Serbia when she read that declaration?

"Did she think for a moment that only meant when the time arose that we would send a General down to the Eastern waters to try and find out what the situation was as regards the Dardanelles and Egypt, and Serbia, and all these other parts in the Eastern theatre of the war?

"No, I say there was a direct pledge to Serbia."

He rejoiced to hear from the Prime Minister that in the last few days the Government had made up their minds, in conjunction with the Allies, to carry out the pledge to Serbia; but valuable time had been lost. When he had heard there were no plans, he had severed his connection with the Cabinet.

The course of the speech, as of this story, would suggest that Serbia was more the occasion than the cause of this crisis. But Carson had stated his views to the Prime Minister in a letter which he had his permission to publish. Here there were cries of "Read it" from the House, and so it came about that Sir Edward Carson's letter of resignation of 12th October, 1915, finds a place in the pages of Hansard.<sup>1</sup>

This letter is confined to the point immediately at issue—for Carson a point more of honour than of policy. He founded himself upon the declaration of the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, which we have already quoted. "In view of that statement,

<sup>1</sup> Off. Deb., H. of C., vol. lxxv.



Carson wrote, "I cannot understand how England can now abandon Serbia to her fate without national dishonour."

But it was also a failure in policy: Bulgaria was being allowed to crush an ally, Roumania would be alienated and Greece encouraged to follow the King rather than Venizelos and the Chamber: "The loss to our prestige will be incalculable, and a very grave menace will threaten our Eastern Empire."

Here Carson must have been conscious that he was following a line of argument which led him (also) into the dangerous course of following political ends in the face of military objections. He did, however, attempt to circumvent this dilemma:

"I am quite aware," he argued, "of the difficulties suggested in the appreciation of the General Staff of 9th October, and I need hardly say that I have no intention of setting up my own opinion in opposition to it. Nevertheless, I feel confident that if forces are to be taken from the Western theatre, we ought to proceed vigorously with a concentration at Salonika, and to use our naval power, as far as may be possible, in order to demonstrate that, however impossible it may be at the moment, we are resolved to preserve their country for the Serbians, as we have undertaken to have Belgium restored to the Belgians."

There is much virtue in an "if," yet an impartial biographer finds it difficult to accept the logic of this argument. Did the General Staff advise against such a concentration? If they did, was it any less wrong to override their advice in the case of Salonika than in the case of Gallipoli?

As regards Greece, Carson proposed "vigorous efforts to compel her to fulfil her Treaty obligations." It was upon her invitation that we had sent troops to Salonika in conjunction with the French, and we should be made ridiculous, "and placed in a position of dishonour towards Serbia" if we were compelled to withdraw.

Then Carson laid down his idea of a policy in Greece:

"Greece—that is the King's party—is afraid of the Central Powers. We ought to make her afraid of us. Our naval supremacy enables us to do this, and for my own part I would not hesitate to inform her that unless she is prepared to continue her policy of joining with the Allies in the defence of Serbia, we will break off friendly relations."

Here again it would seem to be the duty of the biographer to point out that the King of the Hellenes and his General Staff had asked for 300,000 men from the Allies as a condition of entering the war; that they had reason to fear for the safety of their northern provinces if they sent the Greek Army north into Serbia without such assistance, and that the Allies had not been able to send or even to promise 50,000 men. Was it fair to go to war with Greece because M. Venizelos (like Mr. Asquith) was so rash as to propose to disregard the advice of his military experts?

Sir Edward Carson was upon firmer ground in his more general complaint.

"I could understand," he had written, "a policy of limiting all our actions to the Western theatre, and using all our resources there (which is, I think, in reality what the War Staff suggests), and in that way to relieve the situation in the East. But to send an army to Egypt to await action, which may or which may not be possible, on the report of a General to be sent to Gallipoli, seemed the most futile and hesitating decision that could be come to, and one calculated to lead to a further dissipation of our forces."

As to the Dardanelles, he did not believe that when Germany had gained access to the lines of communication with Constantinople it would be possible to maintain our efforts at Gallipoli—"indeed, I doubt very much if our troops can stay there until that event happens." Mr. Bonar Law had already put that point with unanswerable force in a memorandum.

Here there were cries from the House of "Read the memorandum," which Carson ignored. He had no desire to add to the difficulties of the Government which he had felt obliged to leave. "I am entirely in accord," the letter concluded, "with your policy that the war must be fought out to the end at any sacrifice, and until we have brought it to a successful conclusion."

But he could not forbear a touch of sarcasm at the close of his speech. Eloquent perorations—such as the Prime Minister had made—were misappropriate. He hoped that the plan of the new expedition had been worked out clearly and definitely, "because at the time I wrote my letter I could find no trace of any such existing." Valuable time had been lost—"and unfortunately war does not stand still."

Such was Carson's case. On the point of honour Sir Edward Grey found something to reply. There was, indeed, his pledge—"to give to our friends in the Balkans all the help in our power in the way most welcome to them, without qualification and reserve." What, however, he had wished to convey was that once Bulgaria joined the enemy there would be no more talk of concessions to Bulgaria from Greece and Serbia: such help as we were prepared to give would be given "without any qualification or reserve." But as no help could be given—as in fact there were no troops to spare—there was no breach of faith in not giving any—or in giving only a few, and in giving them too late.

In the end, the British contrived to send 13,000 men and the French sent 20,000 men under that political soldier, General Sarraill, who arrived, as already stated, *comme la moutarde après le dîner*.

Sir Edward Carson, like many of his countrymen, was angry at what he regarded as the desertion of Serbia—angry with Greece, angry with Grey. He was a little consoled and confirmed in his opinion by a letter he received some time afterwards from M. Venizelos.

But other men had other opinions. When Carson spoke to the editor of the *Morning Post* on his grievance, that old campaigner replied with a shrug that it was "the rub of the green." We make war, said Kitchener, not as we would but as we must. And it is fair to add that the Serbians, whose Army was tossed like a dog on the horns of a bull over the mountains of Albania into Corfu, bore no grudge against the Allies. If they were invaded, so was Belgium, so was France. They agreed with Mr. Gwynne: it was the rub of the green.

## CHAPTER XII

### *A Packet of Letters*

Lord Crewe – Dr. Crozier – F. S. Oliver – Jack Sandars – Jesse Collings – Josiah Wedgwood – George Moore – Sir Henry Wilson – General Pole Carew.

THE letters and farewells of his colleagues might have disarmed Sir Edward Carson if his intention had been hostile. Even the Prime Minister, whom the blow hit hardest, expressed a personal regard, even Sir Edward Grey, whose policy he directly and vehemently attacked, testified to the honesty of his motive. And Lord Crewe, the close friend and constant supporter of these two Ministers, wrote (on the 20th October, 1915) to express “my personal regret, which I can assure you is genuine, at the abrupt closing of our association in the Government.

“I understand,” the Lord President of the Council continued, “you are saying something in the House about your resignation, and I know very well there will be no tinge of bitterness in your explanation. Nobody could have avoided noticing for some time past your dissatisfaction with the structure and working of the machine, and with much of its recent output, the defects of which I daresay you largely ascribe to its unwieldy form and the way in which it creaks as it works. I can assure you that I don’t doubt that it needs a good deal of improvement and I trust that it may get it; but I am sorry that you have felt bound to sacrifice your part in the business, and I should like to record my sense of the courtesy I have always received from you during a companionship which we could never have anticipated and to thank you for it.”

There were others, however, who looked on with less philosophy. Carson’s old friend John Baptist Crozier, Archbishop of Armagh and Primate of Ireland, wrote in bewildered dismay from Dublin:

“Oct. 17, 1915.

“MY DEAR NED,—Forgive me for a moment if I dare to exercise myself ‘in great matters and in things too high for

me.'—May I implore of you for God's sake if you can possibly do so to stay in the Cabinet. I cannot really tell you what an overwhelming blow it would be to us at home and to our sons in the fighting line if at this awful crisis one of the few strong men—trusted, tried, relied on—were to leave the ship of state. If you could with a few others form a new Government, then we would rejoice to know the weak-kneed men were to be cleared away; but to weaken a Cabinet in face of the men who have little backbone already would seem to us too terrible to contemplate.

"If we are drifting on the rocks, at any rate let us go down together with flags flying and drums beating.

"Forgive me but I see only National disaster in your possible departure.

"Yours affectionately,

"JOHN B. ARMAGH, Archbishop."

Carson must have explained the matter to his friend by return, for two days later the Primate wrote again:

"Most grateful thanks for your letter. I can honestly and earnestly say that I have more faith in your judgment and in your Patriotism than in my own. And how much more in a case where you have inside knowledge and I have none.

"I have tried without ceasing for the past five months to make men hope. But I confess that if I did not believe with all my heart in our God's over-ruling care I would almost go mad. For I have seen whither we are drifting drifting—on to the rocks. Sursum Corda. . . ."

A student of history and of politics, F. S. Oliver, who was to become a close friend of Carson's, wrote three days later:

"My opinions are of very little account; but I'm glad and not at all surprised, that you have left the Government. . . . Why I like your speech is that you don't make an attack: thereby you have saved your strength where another man might easily have wasted it. I am not writing this as a friend—though I should like to call myself such—but merely as a selfish member of the British public who wants to conserve all our resources in men and materials—but especially in men. I like your boldness and

dignity and courage. I think you will find yourself a magnet which will draw many particles round it very soon."

And Jack Sandars, Balfour's old secretary, by that time in retirement, wrote on 3rd November, 1915, in stately and judicious approval:

"... You need not be assured that vast numbers of your countrymen are grateful to you for the part you have played; and while they deplore the present loss of your services to the Administration, they console themselves with the reflection that perhaps even at the eleventh hour your late colleagues may profit by your warning and may derive spirit by your determination." The old Civil Servant reviewed and condemned the Dardanelles policy:

"In June last I had some conversation with Lord Fisher on the practicability of forcing the Straits, and he told me that he had plainly advised the Government of the certain failure of the enterprise and of the loss of capital ships which would follow from it. I asked him how it was that the Cabinet ever sanctioned the scheme, and he replied that it was only Balfour's skill and resource in dexterous argument that enabled Churchill to carry it...."

Mr. Sandars went on to consider the main question:

"Your case on the Balkan issue appears to be unanswerable, and I confess that Grey's interposition did not weaken it. So too your observations on the proposal to set up a Committee to be accountable to the swollen Cabinet were as well founded as they were just. I had nearly twenty years of intimate experience of the working of the Cabinet system, and I realise how futile is that machinery for conducting a great war. Indeed, that is abundantly proved by blunder after blunder in the course of the last 15 months. It is the concentration of the final responsibility in a very few heads which alone can produce efficiency, resource and decision."

Sandars expressed his fears of the competence of the Government either to make war or to negotiate peace, and begged Carson not to abandon "your great position in many anxious hearts."

The veteran Jesse Collings wrote from Birmingham: "... I and thousands of other people whom you do not know are

thankful and encouraged to find one man at least with convictions and with courage to act up to them. . . ."

There were letters also from old opponents. "Will you permit one," Josiah Wedgwood wrote, "who has often been against you in the past to say how much sympathy your latest action has created for you in Radical circles.

"I do not know what your grounds for resignation were, but what you have personally given up is obvious, and that you must have given it up in what you believed to be the interests of the country without thought of your own career.

"What we suffer from is not so much a want of money or of men or even of a well-thought-out plan of campaign worked out by the best military opinion, but a want of unselfishness. And yours is the first example among our leaders. . . ."

Friends, and strangers too, wrote from the Front and from Ireland in a similar strain. Lord Esher, from the French armies to which he was attached, added his congratulations to "those you must have received from thousands and thousands of your countrymen.

"You have no conception," he went on, "how the vacillation of our Ministers has affected the relations between England and France, which is the main political and strategic factor of the war.

"This indecision, which has been so apparent to you in connection with Serbia, is no new thing. It unfortunately has dogged the footsteps of our sailors and soldiers since Antwerp.

"I fear it is incurable, and even the strong and fine step you have taken will produce no other result than a temporary impulse, already discernible here since M. Millerand's return.

"If the people would trust a 'Directory' of Three, or better still a 'Consulate' of one, with a body of executive workers chosen among those of our countrymen who are not politicians and talkers first and Englishmen afterwards, we might in the long run beat the Germans.

"Now the issue of this war is more than doubtful.

"Only two men here in France are for the War *à outrance*, Delcassé and Millerand. One of them has gone! If the other goes we shall have a patched-up peace."

George Moore, the novelist, wrote as "an admirer, well-wisher and fellow-countryman."

"... I wish you to know, I cannot tell why, but I do wish you to know, that ever since the Ulster campaign I had regarded you as one of my heroes. You have courage, determination and vision. These qualities go to make up, perhaps more than any others, what men have agreed to call genius. It seems to me that the Empire might be saved if you were at the head of affairs. The mediocrity of the men that form the Cabinet frightens me, and it is beginning to frighten the country.

"Asquith sees that anybody that has tried to do anything has failed so he resolves to do nothing. Having done nothing he cannot be blamed at the end of the war for having done something that did not succeed. He tacks, short tack, long tack, complicated tack, intricate tack, roundabout tack, rigmarole tack.

"King Ferdinand has duped Sir Edward Grey to the top of his bent. A Foreign Secretary that is duped is something less than zero.

"I hear that McKenna will resign if conscription is brought in, and the reason he gives is that conscription is against his principles. One would have thought that he had lived long enough in the world to learn that principles are not eternal things, but relative, good or bad according to circumstances.

"... I have said enough for you to see why a good many people besides myself are looking to you. You have determination, courage and vision. You will not desert Ulster and I hope you will not desert the Empire in this terrible moment."

Another of his correspondents, Sir Henry Wilson, had been, as a soldier, working at the other end of the same tangled skein, and had come to similar conclusions. The lack of central authority, of well-considered policy consistently followed, of plan and of purpose, brought to frustration the courage and the resources of the Allies.

Soldiers and politicians, France and England—all were at cross-purposes. There was no continuity; there was no decision, or if a policy was decided upon to-day it would be abandoned to-morrow. Joffre and Foch were his close friends; he was intimate besides with Clemenceau, who was "entirely opposed to further troops proceeding to the Near East." On the 2nd or 3rd December, 1915, Wilson heard that Briand and Viviani were going over to London to ask for 100,000 more men for Salonika.



and were going to pretend that if the request was not granted the Entente would be dangerously strained. Clemenceau advised the contrary. It was in these circumstances that on the 8rd December, 1915, Sir Henry Wilson wrote no less than three letters (from G.H.Q.) to Sir Edward Carson. He was, he said, not at all happy about the position of affairs:

"We seem incapable of coming to a decision of any sort. This is a sure way of losing the war. Monro reported about Gallipoli on November 8rd. We stand to-day at December 8rd. Government is useless."

Then Wilson turned to consider the danger to our relations with the French, which were put at hazard by "procrastination and total lack of superior direction.

"There are faults on both sides; but this does not mend matters, though it may make an interesting theme to the historian fifty years hence, when he sets out to apportion the blame. I have advocated for months the formation of a strong, small, efficient Commission composed of

"2 Secretaries Foreign Affairs.

"2       "       War.

"2 Cs. in C.

"I care not a rush whether this or some other small body be formed, but I think we are *mad* not to set up anything to stand the shocks of coming disasters and to act as Directive for the future.

"Can you do anything to help? Can't you and Milner get a crowd round you and force Squiff to act or go?

"Charlie Hunter who has been out here for a few days, and goes home to-day, will go and see you. He can explain the situation by word of mouth better than I can by the pen."

In a second letter he enclosed a copy of another to Bonar Law and begged Carson to get the "machinery" started. Robertson had been telegraphed for and was taking the letters, and he added:

"If we refuse a French request for *additional* troops for Salonika it will not strain the Entente.

"If we don't send the troops we have *already promised* it *will* strain the Entente.

"In my opinion the Briand Government will fall over when

the French people find out they are going to have a disaster in Salonika. And Briand wants to save himself.

"Don't do it. No one wants to prolong Briand at the expense of further, or deferred, disaster."

The third letter repeated and reinforced the first two:

"The danger from the Bosch armies has disappeared.

"The danger of quarrelling with the French has greatly increased.

"There is now only one way of losing the war and that is by quarrelling with France, and we are going absolutely straight for that one way. To me the solution lies in a small powerful body of both Governments. . . .

"We are coming appreciably nearer our two disasters of Salonika and Gallipoli and there is no time to lose.

"Now what I suggest to you is that you and Milner should come out in public with the truth.

"Nothing you can say or do, nothing you hide will alter the course of these disasters by a featherweight, but if you have warned the people, if you have exposed the Government, if you have told the truth, then, when the disaster comes, the country will turn to you to save the situation.

"Think it over. No man can say that Clemenceau is not a patriot. I enclose Clemenceau's article in his newspaper. He writes every day. Now think over all this. I am sure I am right."

The letter to Bonar Law went over the same ground, especially urging the "small mixed Committee" to deal with these problems and to obviate useless and mischievous "mass meetings; visits of high officials bent on saving reputations and not on winning the war; occasional and irregular correspondence; passage of irresponsible and ignorant liaison officers, and indeed all the makeshifts and subterfuges which come from not facing the position fairly and squarely and not meeting our friends face to face and speaking out like men and gentlemen."

And three days later Wilson was writing again, this time from Paris:

"The meeting at Calais on Saturday and our meeting at Chantilly both passed off without any *final* decision being come to about Salonika. These mass meetings are not conducive to decisions.

"The time is running short and we want a good and effective machinery *quick*. Otherwise there may be trouble as well as local disasters.

"I have written Bonar again. We want some means of coming to a decision, and that quickly.

"Why not, at the same time, try a dose of truth on Squiff?"

Another soldier friend, General Pole Carew, wrote from Shanbally Castle in County Tipperary on the 13th December, 1915:

"I am, as you know, a miserable brute who lies here in infernal idleness having day after day nothing to do but read the newspapers and ponder over news. That must be my excuse. I cannot but feel, in common I expect with most, that our present Government has made mistakes enough. Surely it is time to stop them. I have seen suggestions of an official Opposition. The exact meaning of that I cannot tell. But if it would be a step towards putting you at the head of affairs I, for one, would endorse it. Do please remember that, however much you might, and probably would dislike putting yourself forward, there is a time when a strong man is a necessity to the country, and that it is the duty of a strong man *not to stand aside*. Awful cheek of me to say this but I *do* mean it.

"I have the greatest confidence in the eventual fall of Germany—want of food, want of money, want of men, will ensure that—but is it right that this country should suffer so grievously from the indecisions of its rulers? Look at the Dardanelles. Look at Salonika. I believe the Dardanelles was largely owing to Sir Ian Hamilton's folly; but I think also Winston Churchill began the trouble by giving the Turks warning. At Salonika, it seems to me, our Government failed to come to a decision until too late to help Serbia and then sent a few men who might have been useful as allies of Serbia but not much use when she was beat. It is impossible to conduct a war on the 'Wait and See' policy.

"I say nothing of Mesopotamia. That is apparently Townshend's fault, and, as I happen to know him, I could expect nothing else. He is worse than Ian Hamilton. Who sent him there, Heaven knows. But surely it is time we had some strong men at the head of affairs here. I know no one but you. Do go

in for it; and, if you approve of him, get Milner as your Lieutenant in the Lords. Landsowne is no good. He was at Eton with me, and he has never been able to make up his mind.

"Now please forgive me for this impertinent letter, and awful scrawl—I am more than half blind—and again I say do come to our rescue."

And the General added in a postscript:

"And then what is this Trade Agreement with certain Danish houses? If true, I think it is the greatest crime of all.

"Talk about muzzling our Navy! How can these things be possible?"

There were, besides, several letters from General Sir Bryan Mahon at Salonika which must have given Carson cause to think. The old soldier, writing on the 4th and 14th November, 1915, was quite sure that it was too late to save Serbia, and that nothing was any good under half a million of men against Bulgaria. If they had an army big enough the Allies might march on Sofia and cut the German communications with Constantinople; but their small force was of no use and might even end by being interned by Greece.

As for the country, he liked it—"a mixture of Switzerland and Connemara"; but there were no roads, and without much transport and a big army nothing could be done.

As to Carson's resignation: "It is hinted in the papers it was about this part of the world. If so I do not wonder—we have made an awful hash of it both politically and in a military sense. I only hope we are not going to make another blunder by sending a small force to Serbia. . . . If we cannot send a large army we had better do nothing."

Thus the soldier, as is usual in war, had the last word.

It will be seen that there are ideas common to these letters. They are full of the same solicitude: their writers are evidently groping for a man and for a policy; they are all oppressed by the heaviness of the crisis and they look to Carson to see the country through.

## CHAPTER XIII

### *In Opposition*

Carson's friends - The party truce - Life in London - The blockade - Trading with the enemy - The national cause - The voluntary system - Ireland and conscription - Carson and Redmond.

SIR EDWARD CARSON had entered the Coalition with reluctance and left it without regret. Political ambitions he had none; he was tired; he would have preferred the glow of his domestic hearth and to resume his long-neglected practice of the law; but for the terrible entanglement of the war, from which he could not escape.

The more vehement amongst his friends wanted to make him the Leader of an Opposition even before he had left the Government. Thus Mr. Amery had written to him (on the 14th October, 1915): "Don't go out alone if you can possibly help it. If you and Lloyd George go, that is another matter. Then you have a nucleus of something to go upon afterwards." But it would have been repugnant to Carson's sense of honour to have concerted resignation either with Mr. Bonar Law or Mr. Lloyd George, who shared his views, and even when he was free, he would not resume the partisan. "It is the system rather than the persons of Ministers," he wrote to a correspondent at that time, "which should be criticised."

Carson's house in Eaton Place became the resort of men who shared his discontent with the conduct of the war—every Monday night, in a cycle of their dinner tables, these friends met: Lord Milner, who lived in College Street near by; F. S. Oliver, who could illuminate events by the light of history; Geoffrey Robinson (later Geoffrey Dawson) of *The Times*, with the latest from clubs and correspondents; L. S. Amery, bringing the news and the views of the House of Commons; sometimes the old Raider, Dr. Jameson, sick in body but alert in mind; sometimes Henry Wilson on a flying visit from General Headquarters; these

and others kept Carson in touch with men and events. And he remained besides in Parliament, a vigilant critic whose interventions had the more weight by reason of their infrequency and moderation. Carson held himself in reserve.

The Government, on a superficial view, was securely seated. Politics, like the frozen pirate, were embedded in the ice of the party truce, to be thawed back into life, by agreement, only after the war should be safely over. The House of Commons was bereft of the best of its Members—no fewer than two hundred, mainly Conservative, being either at the Front or occupied in war work of some kind. When one of these absentees died or was killed, the vacant seat was filled by an arrangement of the caucus, which absolved the new Member, like the old, from his Parliamentary duties. With the rump of the Radical Party the more devoted to the House because it feared the country, with the Opposition partly in the field and partly attached to the Coalition, with 76 Irish Nationalists in sedulous attendance, the Government seemed to be secure against all vicissitudes.

Under the Parliament Act, it is true, the House was due for dissolution upon the 30th January, 1916, but on the pretext that a General Election would disturb public confidence, and be unfair to electors in the field, Parliament decreed its own continuance. In the twenty years of the Napoleonic Wars there had been six General Elections; but the Coalition preferred the precedent of the Long Parliament, which continued its unpopular life by its own perpetuation Acts until it was brought to an unregretted end by Oliver Cromwell.

Thus, although the Prime Minister felt the shock and regretted the loss, the security of the Government was only a little shaken by the resignation of Sir Edward Carson. F. E. Smith stepped into his place and gaily undertook the defence of everything not otherwise defensible. A censorship of the Press kept the newspapers within bounds.

London, indeed, lived in a sort of physical and intellectual twilight, its streets obscured for fear of the enemy and its newspapers for fear of the Government, subsisting on rancid bacon and more rancid rumour. The Russian Steam-roller was of great comfort long after it sank in the Priepet marshes;

Russian soldiers had been seen shaking the snow off their boots on our railway platforms and marching across Waterloo Bridge between one railway terminus and another. There was, besides, Mr. Hilaire Belloc, who demonstrated week by week in *Land and Water* that the German armies were being exterminated at the rate of 400,000 a month and would shortly become a minus quantity. None the less effectively the enemy continued the work of His Majesty's Opposition with a running criticism to which there was no adequate reply. He showed his contempt for law and opinion by dropping a bomb now on a newspaper office and again on Lincoln's Inn. If he spared the Palace of Westminster it was thought to be of set purpose.

There were nevertheless symptoms outside St. Stephen's that the patience of the nation was wearing thin. Independent candidates defied the arrangements of the Whips; one of them, C. B. Stanton, scored a victory at Merthyr; another, Thomas Gibson Bowles, although he was to fail in winning Market Harborough, damaged the Government a good deal by his attack on their blockade policy.

There were, indeed, several things on which public criticism was with difficulty restrained. The Government had shown itself strangely reluctant to impose a naval blockade upon Germany. Although the Declaration of London had been rejected by Parliament before the war, it had nevertheless been proclaimed on the 20th August, 1914, "as if the same had been ratified by His Majesty," and the whole body of our laws of naval warfare had been nullified by its operation. The enemy was not himself bound by it; the United States and other neutrals had never adopted it; it made effective blockade illegal and impossible. By March 1915 the Government were forced to revise their policy; but they did not revise their law. On the contrary, the change was made in the form of a Reprisal Order, and Mr. Asquith announced that they would no longer be restrained by "juridical niceties"—with the result that the British Government became more deeply embroiled with the neutrals and especially with the United States. The Americans protested that, while their trade with Scandinavia was being interfered with, the British trade with those countries had enormously increased, and the British reply that the Americans were making "profits

equal to or greater than those of the mercantile community of Great Britain in Scandinavia and the Netherlands as a consequence of the closing of German ports" was felt to give away the whole case. Although it was whispered on behalf of the Government that the cause of these laxities lay in the need to conciliate America, the complaint of the United States was based upon a grievance more legitimate and more difficult to meet—that Great Britain, while interfering with American trade, was herself supplying the enemy. While still in office Sir Edward Carson was in correspondence on the subject with Thomas Gibson Bowles.

"*Quantula sapientia mundus regitur!*" Bowles exclaimed, in a letter of the 12th October, 1915. "How black things look! We shall still, I doubt, have to come back to the sea as our sole remaining ally. In any case we must not allow a single shred of our sea power to be trafficked away."

In December 1915 the Foreign Office concluded a trading agreement with Denmark, and Lord Robert Cecil refused information on the subject to the House of Commons, whereupon Carson vigorously protested in the Press. "The blockade," Carson wrote, "instituted by way of an Order in Council of last March is an international matter affecting all neutrals as well as belligerents, and its maintenance in the Prize Court must be either in its entirety or not at all. In such circumstances, the dealings of the Government with any neutral, in the way of granting facilities for trade which may reach a belligerent, must affect the rights of all neutrals and may imperil the legality of the Order itself."

"To many," he went on, "it has long been apparent that it is only by using every ounce of power and advantage which our naval supremacy gives us that we can successfully bring the war to a conclusion in the shortest time, and I believe the nation would greatly resent any relaxation on any ground of the principles of blockade so emphatically announced in the House of Commons in March last by the Prime Minister."

How shrewd were Carson's suspicions of this Danish agreement was disclosed after the war by Rear-Admiral Consett, our Naval Attaché in Scandinavia from 1912 to 1919. England by her free-trade policy had created in Denmark a great factory of foods and



fats, which Germany largely took over during the war. While this transfer was going forward England obligingly provided Denmark with raw material in the shape of fertilisers, coal, linseed, fishing nets and agricultural machinery. "The German fighting forces," says Admiral Consett bitterly, "were sustained by ourselves. . . . The munitions that reached Germany were brought over to her in ships which passed as freely through the waters of the English Channel and North Sea as those that carried our own troops . . . our Navy was these ships' common protector."

Carson's stand against these laxities brought him many letters in support both from naval officers and the mercantile community. "My friends on the Admiralty War Staff," one old sailor wrote to him, "assure me that the indictment of the F.O. respecting the Blockade is amply justified. They choke with indignation." Englishmen of both parties, filled with disquiet at such manifest ineptitudes, had already turned to Carson as to a national leader. On the 31st October, 1915, Mr. Wickham Steed, then on *The Times*, wrote to Carson:

"Mr. Annan Bryce . . . asked whether I had told you that he and other Liberals, who had differed strongly from you in the past, would support you through thick and thin if you would give them a lead. . . ."

And the *Morning Post*, in an article on the resignation of Sir Edward Carson, pointed to the need of a national policy and a national leader. The war had disclosed terrible weaknesses in our economic system. We had neglected vital industries—agriculture, sugar, dyes, iron and steel, important branches of engineering. German interests still controlled great commodities, like copper and spelter, even when they were produced within the bounds of the British Empire. "Hitherto our politicians have never once made a robust national appeal to the interests and the racial instincts of this stout old nation. . . . What is most urgently required is that those who think with Sir Edward Carson range themselves upon his side and organise themselves into a possible alternative Government strong enough in men and interests to take over the heavy responsibilities which are being shirked by the present holders of office."<sup>1</sup>

Carson was not to be goaded into action against his judgment

<sup>1</sup> *Morning Post*, 20th October, 1915.

of what lay within his powers and the possibilities of the time. It is plain, however, that he saw the need for vigilance even if he held his hand. "The Government," he wrote, "are now asking the House to extend the life of this Parliament for another year—in my opinion much too long a period in existing circumstances—and I think the House and the country will do well to remember that in assenting to this proposal . . . they are being kept in ignorance of the military situation in the various theatres of the war, and also of the policy of the Government as to the use to be made of our supremacy at sea."<sup>1</sup>

In the House of Commons, Carson's interventions were chiefly connected with the causes for which he had fought within the Government. On the 22nd November, 1915, we find him arguing strongly for conscription and about the same time he was using urgent language on the procrastinations of Gallipoli. "What the country wanted to know," he said, "was if nothing was being done from August 10th to December 20th, why we had left these men in a kind of hell there, sometimes losing men by sickness at the rate of a thousand a day while somebody was making up his mind."

The strength of the critic and the growing disquietude of the nation combined to make Carson, almost in spite of himself, the leader of a new Opposition. Unionists and Liberals began to gather round him, and a new spirit of urgency and independence crept into the debates of Parliament. In *The Times* of the 7th January, 1916, we find mention of a new Committee of Unionist Members of the House of Commons, formed for the more vigorous prosecution of the war, of which Sir Edward Carson was Chairman. This Committee, gathering strength, and co-operating with a Liberal Committee of a similar character, was to become a great force in Parliament in the dark days which were to follow.

At the end of 1915 and the beginning of 1916, Carson and his friends were chiefly occupied with the great question of the supply of men for the armies in the field. The Government had drained the voluntary system almost dry; but hesitated miserably under the objections of Liberal Ministers and the threats of Trade Union leaders, although there was no longer any hope that Lord Derby's recruiting campaign would supply the growing

<sup>1</sup> Letter, "The Danish Agreement," *The Times*, 18th December, 1915.

demand of the depleted regiments. The losses of the Dardanelles intensified the crisis. Thus we find Mr. H. A. Gwynne writing to Carson (on the 16th December, 1915) informing him of a telegram received from General Monro as to the infantry strength of three Territorial Divisions, viz.: 10,764 men left, or for 36 battalions an average of almost exactly 300 per battalion in place of 980. Gwynne enclosed a letter from General Callwell, who reported that the first four classes of unmarried men on Derby's books would only produce 20,000, "a mere drop in the ocean in view of existing shortage. . . ." It would take about 100,000 men to bring the Territorial Divisions in the field up to Establishment—leaving maintenance entirely out of account. No proper arrangements had been made for feeding the Dardanelles army with drafts, and its infantry, at critical times, had been 30 per cent and even 40 per cent under strength. General Callwell had not the slightest confidence in Kitchener taking the right line or confessing the truth as to existing depletion: "We shall have," he said, "to have compulsory service, and the great point is to ensure that the Bill be introduced without a moment's delay."

The Government, indeed, were being forced along the road that Carson had exhorted them to follow less by his exhortations than by the effects which he had foreseen. On the 1st January, 1916, Sir John Simon resigned his office as Home Secretary; four days later the Prime Minister introduced the Military Service (No. 2) Bill, which applied the principle of compulsion to England, Scotland and Wales. It was what Carson described as an anæmic measure. It applied compulsion only to single men, and made large exceptions. In particular, Ireland was exempt from its provisions.

Some time before (on 3rd November, 1915) J. Mackay Wilson (brother of Sir Henry) had written to Carson from Ireland, warning him of what was afoot: "If my information is good, it goes to show the existence of a gigantic conspiracy over here, headed by Redmond, Devlin and Dillon, and abetted by certain high officials in the Castle, which would result in a differentiation being made as regards Ireland, if and when National Service comes on. . . . It would be absolutely fatal if Ireland were left out of the scheme."

This exception brought Carson once more into conflict with his old opponent John Redmond. The Irish Nationalist Leader had done all that he could do for voluntary recruiting in Ireland; but compulsion placed him in a cruel dilemma. "Redmond's influence," says his biographer, "had prevailed to secure Ireland's exclusion from it; but he knew what bitter feelings the debate would provoke. At heart he felt humiliated and sore that Ireland should be held up to the world as claiming exemption from what he regarded as the common burdens of the war."<sup>1</sup> With John Dillon at his elbow, a sullen party behind him, and the forces of Sinn Fein gathering strength in Ireland and America, he dared not support a measure which he was ashamed to oppose.

Carson, on the other hand, desired above all things to see compulsion in Ireland, since he knew that the voluntary system was draining his country of its Loyalists and leaving the ill-affected in occupation. We find him making direct appeal to Redmond on the subject. "He and I," said Carson, "are old opponents—I do not use the word enemies—and I can assure him from my heart that nothing would be more likely to bring us together on some sort of common platform than that we should find Ireland and Scotland and England absolutely unanimous in what they think is necessary for the carrying on of this war."

And Carson went on to plead with Redmond on behalf of that minority of which Redmond himself, if not in his politics then in his instincts, was a member. "I can assure him," said Carson, "that the exclusion of Ireland . . . is harmful to many people . . . especially hurtful to those in the three southern provinces, people who are of my political creed and of my religious faith, and who, I think the hon. and learned gentleman will say, have joined with him on many a platform in trying to bring about the common object of enlisting soldiers."<sup>2</sup>

Redmond must have well understood the implications of that appeal. He and the Irish Unionists, fighting in the same cause, had both incurred the same hatred. They were both marked down for destruction. It might have been better for him in the

<sup>1</sup> Denis Gwynn, *Life of John Redmond*, p. 464.

<sup>2</sup> Parl. Deb.; H. of C., vol. lxxvii., c. 1474, 11th January, 1916.

end if he had taken the line for which Carson pleaded; but it was beyond his power. Redmond was already in chains.

Carson turned to his old friend and colleague the Colonial Secretary. "If we were to look at this as a question of principle," Mr. Bonar Law had said, "there would be absolutely no justification for such a proposal, none whatever." A wrong principle, Carson remarked with a touch of scorn, requires a strong defence. But what was the Government's case—that Ireland was different from England, Scotland and Wales? Surely, he said, the elementary question of the Defence of the Realm was not one of Party politics but of great Imperial necessity, and to treat any portion of the United Kingdom as a separate entity for this purpose was to give up the whole idea of unity; it was to establish chaos in matters of high Imperial policy at the very centre and the very heart of the Empire.

Then Carson faced Redmond again with a question which must have touched him to the quick:

"I ask the hon. and learned Member for Waterford what is to become of our regiments with Irish names if the drafts are not kept up?"

"They will be kept up and have been kept up," Redmond replied desperately.

"They cannot be kept up," said Carson, who had been studying the figures.

"They can," retorted Redmond.

"With the numbers which are at present available they cannot be kept up," Carson insisted, and he went on to tell how the Irish regiments were recruiting their strength from England and from Scotland.

It was an unhappy struggle between these two men, so near together yet so far apart. "I believe," Carson concluded sorrowfully, "that when the hour of victory comes, as it certainly will, we who are Irishmen will feel ashamed to remember that we expected others to make sacrifices from which we provided our own exclusion."<sup>1</sup>

Another passage in the speech must be quoted, since it casts a retrospective light on the issues upon which Carson had resigned from the Government. He was speaking of the need for men.

<sup>1</sup> Parl. Deb., H. of C., vol. lxxvii., c. 1482-4.

“Let the casual observer,” he said, “take up a little more the history of this matter. Has he ever asked himself: ‘Why did we leave the Dardanelles, where so much blood and so much treasure had been spent?’ The only reason that can be given, I suppose, why we left the Dardanelles was because we had not got the men to go through with the great undertaking which had been so admirably conceived. . . .

“If he looks further on he sees the march through Serbia, and he sees that little nation to whom we had given the idea that they were going to get so much assistance, and who got so little until it was too late. What was the reason? Was it any unwillingness on the part of the Government? Not at all! It was because we had not the men to send them to give them this assistance.

“In these circumstances I have not heard one solitary argument as to how we are to carry on this war if the country will not give us the men. What is the alternative? I see Members get up one after another and point out—‘You are going to injure this industry or that industry, or you are leading to industrial compulsion or something else.’ What does it all matter as long as we win the war; and what would anything matter if we lost the war?”

## CHAPTER XIV

### *Law and Politics*

The Slingsby case – Birchington – McNeill's advice – Bonar Law – Minatory words – Lloyd George.

WHILE these grave issues impended, Carson was drawn once again into his long-neglected law courts by a *cause célèbre* which gave both him and the British public some little diversion from their troubles. The case had originally taken the form of a petition to establish the legitimacy of a child of four, the reputed son of a Yorkshire gentleman of an ancient house, Charles Slingsby of Scriven Park, near Knaresborough. The story, as unfolded in the Court of Mr. Justice Bargrave Deane, showed that there had been trouble in the family on account of a marriage deemed unsuitable. Charles Slingsby had wedded an American widow, some years older than himself. It was alleged that, being a Roman Catholic, the lady found it difficult to get on with her father-in-law, a clergyman of the Church of England. There may have been other reasons. What is certain is that there was a coolness in the family on the marriage.

Charles Slingsby and his wife had made their home in British Columbia; but when Mrs. Slingsby, not for the first time, announced hopes of a child, she resolved that the birth should take place in San Francisco. To that end she left her home in the summer of 1910, and in due course a telegram was received by Charles Slingsby informing him that he was the father of a son.

For various reasons the family in Yorkshire had their suspicions of this presumptive heir to the Slingsby estates. They instituted inquiries and it was thought to be a suspicious circumstance that, whereas the child was born on the 1st September, 1910, a few days before, an advertisement had appeared in the San Francisco *Examiner*: "Wanted for adoption, a newly born infant, must be a boy." Mrs. Slingsby had at first denied any

knowledge of this advertisement; but a few days before the case was opened she admitted the authorship. It was (she said) the whim of a woman in ill health: she had inserted the advertisement in case she might lose the child which she expected.

There was also an application for a foundling in the books of a certain San Francisco charity by a Mrs. Charles Slingsby—an entry partly erased. As for the birth certificate, which might have been thought decisive, it contained a mistake as to the place of birth which had been altered on affidavit by Mrs. Slingsby. The doctor who signed it had later, as she alleged, applied to the lady, being “in great need of funds,” which she had refused him. It was for this reason, so she said, that he afterwards testified that the child had first seen the light at his surgery, born of a woman of dubious antecedents who gave a sketchy account of its paternity. The Slingsby baby was really born, according to the petitioner, in the house of an old friend of Mrs. Slingsby, one Hattie Blain. It was thought to be a strange place to choose for a confinement, the more as, there being no servant in the house, the patient was alone when Mrs. Blain went out shopping. There was, moreover, some reason to believe that Mrs. Slingsby was not there at all but at her hotel at the time when the birth was said to have taken place.

Such in brief outline was the story unfolded before Mr. Justice Bargrave Deane, and it might seem strange that His Lordship dismissed all doubts and found for the petitioner. Mrs. Slingsby was in effect the only witness for the child, and she, as we have seen, had perjured herself before the case began; but her abundant tears may have washed from His Lordship’s benevolent mind the recollection of that taint in her evidence, and made him forget the shrewd presumption of the Romans—“*Omnia præsumuntur contra mendacem.*”

What, moreover, carried conviction with the judge was what he called “the extraordinary likeness of the little boy to Mr. Slingsby.” The further to satisfy himself on this point, the judge brought in a friend, Sir George Frampton, the sculptor, who not only confirmed him in this impression, but “pointed out to him a most remarkable resemblance between the boy’s left ear and that of his mother.” Thus fortified, the Court held that the Slingsby baby was the lawful child of its reputed father



and therefore "tenant in tail male in remainder expectant on the death of his father of the Slingsby estates."<sup>1</sup>

The trustees and uncles, being still dissatisfied, submitted the papers to Sir Edward Carson, who gave them one of the shortest opinions on record: that he could not understand how such a judgment could be based on such evidence; that there had been a grave miscarriage of justice and that the case ought to go to appeal.

On the 17th January, 1916, Lady Carson noted in her Diary: "I went down with Edward to the Courts to hear him open the Slingsby case. He was awfully good. The Court was full. I shouldn't think she had a leg to stand on."

Before the Master of the Rolls, Lord Justice Warrington and Mr. Justice Bray, Sir Edward Carson went through a formidable book of affidavits which he held up before him. The American detective agency had done its work so well that Sir Edward Carson had little difficulty in showing that the evidence of Mrs. Slingsby was open to doubt or proved to be false, in almost every particular.

To illustrate the danger of relying on facial resemblance, Carson quoted a story from the *Reminiscences of Sergeant Ballantyne*, who had good hopes of being successful in a case of the kind when the judge suddenly gave judgment against him.

"You were nearly misleading me," His Lordship afterwards remarked to Ballantyne, "but I happened to catch sight of your client in court, and the resemblance between him and the child was enough for me."

"Good heavens," said the lawyer, "but my client was not in court, it was the Solicitor's Clerk . . ."

On the 14th March, 1916, the Master of the Rolls delivered judgment. He found that Mrs. Slingsby, the only material witness for the defence, was not to be relied on, nor could he bring himself to believe that an expectant mother would advertise for a child: "This is so repugnant to all that one knows of maternal instincts that I cannot bring myself to doubt that her story ought to be rejected."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See *The Times* Report, Probate, Divorce and Admiralty Division, December 3rd, 1914 - February 4th, 1915.

<sup>2</sup> *Slingsby v. Attorney-General. The Times*, January 18th, 1916-March 14th, 1916.

Sir Edward Carson had won his case; but long before judgment was delivered his strength had given out.

His health, indeed, had long been precarious. An almost life-long internal pain, which the doctors could neither explain nor cure, prostrated him at intervals, intensified no doubt by recent anxieties and fatigues. In January his physician had ordered him to rest, and on the 8th February, 1916, it was announced in the Press that he had been obliged to cancel all engagements for the next few weeks.

A cold and snowy February kept the invalid in Town for a while; but on the 8th March, 1916, the Carsons made a move to Birchington. Carson's old friend, Charles Gill, K.C., had a bungalow above the cliffs, and Mrs. Hubert Smiley, his daughter, lent the Carsons her house near by. The weather was fine but cold, as it usually is on the Isle of Thanet. "Edward seems better already," Lady Carson wrote next day. "It's too odd," she noted in her Diary, "to see the barbed wire all along the esplanade: there must be miles of it." On the 19th they "saw many aeroplanes and a great many shots bursting round one which turned out to be a German which was being chased by ours. Mrs. Spender hurried off to Westgate but didn't get quite up to the air ground in time to see Lieutenant Bone come back after finishing off the enemy. There was great cheering. The Huns dropped bombs on Ramsgate and Margate and killed some people. We went down to the shore and saw two of our seaplanes go up and one towed in that had fallen into the sea."

Not only these seaside diversions reminded Carson that he could not escape from the war. He had urgent calls and letters from friends about a new crisis developing in Parliament on the still-vexed question of recruitment. The Unionist War Committee was bickering in the absence of its leader. On the 18th March, Mrs. Churchill looked in on her way back from Dover where she had bidden farewell to her husband. "Apparently," Lady Carson noted, "he was quite decided to come back and lead the Radical War Committee. Edward told her Winston had made everything very difficult the way he dashes off first on one thing then on another." On the 20th March, Carson's good friend and staunch supporter, Ronald McNeill, wrote him a long letter about troubles in the War Committee,

a meeting with Lord Derby, another with the Liberal War Committee and a resolution they proposed to adopt on the need to extend the Military Service Act to include married men.

They were clamouring for the return of their Chairman. Would he wire about the resolution?

Then Ronald McNeill turned to a larger question:

"There is," he wrote, "in any case one thing I am becoming more than ever convinced of, and that is that you must now very seriously face the possibility of your becoming P.M. in the near future. There are many men *on both sides* whose thoughts turn that way, and I am frequently asked whether I think your health and strength would be sufficient. Of course I always say I have no doubt of it, if you are once convinced that the country requires you. It might and probably would require a general election. In considering the whole situation and its possibilities you really *must* now dismiss from your mind all the mere personal factors by which I mean your relations with Bonar. He is far too good a fellow to feel that you should let personal friendship weigh against duty to the country."

McNeill went on to consider policy:

"There are two points on which at the present moment a policy could be built that would be both widely popular and also for 'the more vigorous prosecution of the war,' and if you thought fit to make a clear pronouncement upon them you would immediately be the head and centre of a growing party in the country, and the 'independents,' who are now fighting and winning by-elections would at once be 'Carsonites.' The two points are (1) Compulsion for all of military age, (2) Relief as regards financial obligations, contracts, etc., for men serving in the army.

"A third strong plank would be a definite policy for trade after the war with Allies and Dominions against Germany on the lines Mr. Hughes is advocating.

"This may be foolish in your eyes perhaps, but if so it is no matter. Anyhow you can turn them over in your mind in your seclusion by the sea."

The letter ended with an invitation to Cushenden for Easter.

Carson, we may suppose, had little liking at least for the personal side of these counsels of a friend; but he was being

driven back into politics nevertheless. On the 22nd the newspapers published a letter to Gibson Bowles, then fighting the Market Harborough by-election as an independent candidate. "Our Navy and our Navy unhampered," Carson wrote, "must in the long run be the saviour of our country."

On the 23rd F. S. Oliver wrote from Town: "You are well out of London. We live in darkness by day as well as by night. I wonder have the guns at Verdun upset meteorology and disturbed atmospheric currents.

"... You are badly wanted but it would be folly to defeat your cure by coming back too soon. Recruiting is disturbing the doves of Downing Street; but I am not sure that Hughes is not disturbing them more.<sup>1</sup>

"I hope and believe that there will be some interesting things to communicate when you return. But time presses, presses like the devil! I am sure that in many ways things are going better. Haig and Robertson seem to be working well together; but one regrettable result of that admirable state of things is that the eminent Old Women of the War Committee seem to feel that they can indulge themselves in a respite.

"Your Unionist Committee seems to have been got at in your absence. Query—by that innocent Bonar?"

Carson telegraphed a resolution for the Unionist Committee on the 21st March and received a grateful reply from McNeill. It had been adopted.

"Banbury and four others took it to Bonar to-day (22nd March, 1916) and got only the reply that the Cabinet was to be shortly supplied by the Adjutant-General with figures, and that meanwhile he could say nothing. But he told the deputation that if our party found it necessary in what they believed to be the public interest to vote against the Government or even to defeat them, he would not consider it an act of any disloyalty to himself..."

That the Government were afraid of Carson we gather from an interesting piece of evidence recorded at the time by John Redmond. It appears on the 15th March, 1916, the Irish Leader had occasion to call upon Mr. Bonar Law in connection with a

<sup>1</sup> "Billy" Hughes, Prime Minister of the Commonwealth of Australia, had come to England, and was agitating for a more vigorous policy.

matter touching the Government of New South Wales. When they had concluded the business Bonar Law requested Redmond to remain and to talk with him over the political situation.

"He [Mr. Bonar Law] said," Redmond noted at the time, "he was convinced that the present political situation could not continue, that the Government might be beaten at any moment in the House of Commons, and he was quite certain that, if there was anyone to lead an Opposition, they would be driven from office in a very short time.

"He said that if Sir Edward Carson had the health and desire to take up such a position, he was quite sure he could drive the Government from office in no time."<sup>1</sup>

There was another Minister, with a keener eye than Bonar Law's, who was watching Carson at that time. One day when Ronald McNeill happened to be passing behind the Speaker's Chair, he was aware of Mr. Lloyd George, who proceeded to pace backwards and forwards in front of him. "They are countermanding my orders for munitions," he kept on saying. "They are countermanding my orders for munitions." And then, turning to McNeill, he said that he would be greatly obliged if he could arrange a meeting between Carson and himself when Carson returned to Town.

It was no doubt to this interview that Ronald McNeill referred in the last part of this letter of the 22nd March:

"Lloyd George sent to me to-day to ask anxiously when you would be back. It may be significant of the way his mind is turning that he told me to tell you he thinks it very urgent that the question of settling the electoral register should be considered, and some common line of action concerted. He will want to see you as soon as you come back.

"I will come down on Saturday by the 10.50 and hope to find you full of buck and quite fit to come up on Monday."

Saturday was the 25th and Lady Carson had an entry in her Diary:

"Windy but very sunny. . . . Mr. McNeill came down to luncheon. . . . The Unionist War Committee is at sixes and sevens because Edward is not there. Lord Milner and Mr. Geoffrey Robinson came over to tea. They all made plans that

<sup>1</sup> Denis Gwynn, *The Life of John Redmond*, p. 466.

Asquith must be *forced* to go, and say if not that we shall lose the war. . . .”

On Sunday the 26th March, 1916, the Carsons went back to London. They heard coming up that the *Sussex*, a cross-Channel steamer, had been torpedoed with the loss of 100 lives: “The papers say,” Lady Carson noted in her Diary, “a distinguished Englishman was on board. We were talking about it in the train and a soldier suddenly said—‘What a pity it wasn’t one of the Government.’” Feeling, evidently, ran high.

Next day Mr. Bonar Law came to luncheon. “I really believe,” Lady Carson wrote, “he is hypnotised by Asquith. He thinks it would be difficult to find anyone to do better.” There was, one may note, between Carson and Bonar Law by that time a certain wariness, almost an estrangement. The two old friends belonged to different camps and were following different policies.

On March 28th Carson went to the House of Commons and presided over a meeting of the Unionist War Committee, and it is possible to trace the influence of the Chairman’s directing mind in the proceedings. “The Unionist War Committee,” *The Times* reported on the 29th, “came into line with the Liberal War Committee yesterday by publicly announcing their adhesion to the principles of ‘equal sacrifices from all men of military age.’ At the suggestion of Sir Edward Carson the Unionist Committee agreed to give the Government a week in which to put their House in order. If by Tuesday next the Government has not found a satisfactory solution on the recruiting question Sir Edward Carson will ask for facilities for the discussion of a motion which in the circumstances could only be regarded as a vote of censure on the Ministry.”

Bonar Law was propitiatory but evasive. He wrote to Carson a letter which Carson read to the Committee—that the Government were examining all the evidence available as to the supply of men for the Army, were proceeding as rapidly as possible, and would communicate with the Committee as soon as possible. Sir Edward Carson suggested that Mr. Bonar Law’s letter should be acknowledged and the hope should be added that his reply would be received with as little delay as possible. He suggested to the Committee that after allowing a reasonable time they should proceed to further action.

These were minatory words, suggesting an impatience which Carson expressed in the House of Commons on the following day. He denounced a long course of procrastination: "Is not the sword unsheathed of which we have so often heard? . . . The Government ought not to have asked themselves, 'Whom can we get with convenience? Whom can we draw along with us? Whom can we please?' They ought to have asked themselves the one sole question, 'What is necessary to fulfil and complete the policy which we have announced to the world, to our Colonies, to our Empire and to our Allies.'"

Little wonder that the Government were afraid of Carson. His Unionist Committee were by that time 150 strong—practically the full strength of the English Unionists in regular attendance at the House of Commons, and there was a growing number of Liberals who adhered to his cause. There was, besides, the country—stirring, impatient, angry, apprehensive, ready even to elect a freak candidate, like Mr. Pemberton Billing, the "air member," who entered Parliament at that time. Mr. Asquith, walk as warily as he might, could no longer count upon a majority. And he may have known that at least one of his most important colleagues was already looking round, already preparing. On Friday, March 31st, 1916, Lady Carson noted in her Diary—"Edward and I dined with the McNeills to meet Lloyd George as he wanted to see Edward quietly."

## CHAPTER XV

### *Secret Session*

Attack on Asquith—Doubts of Bonar Law—Lord Derby—Lord Milner—Winston Churchill—Lloyd George—Secret session—Walter Long hopes—Carson says no.

THE political crisis which we have seen developing since March shook the Government like an angry wind throughout the month of April 1916, and concentrated its intensity upon the devoted head of the Prime Minister. Mr. Asquith balanced and temporised; he deferred and he delayed; in particular he postponed the inevitable decision on military service. He took into account Liberal opinion, Irish opinion, Trade Union opinion, and laboured to reconcile them to the inevitable. Confirmed in those habits of compromise by a long course of politics, he refused to concede to the urgency of the times. And so the patriots raged against him as two centuries before they had raged against Robert Walpole, alleging the same cynicism, the same disregard of the nation.

It became the fashion to ascribe to Mr. Asquith all laxities of policy, all misfortunes of war, even partialities to the enemy. Lord Northcliffe led the attack with all his Press, and it was noted that Mr. Lloyd George enjoyed a singular immunity, nor was he exactly officious in defence of his Chief.

These execrations, blown on a popular wind, leaped the Channel and infected the Army, by that time a great part of the nation. Sir Henry Wilson expressed them with native vigour and irreverence in a letter of the 2nd April to Lady Carson.

“Will you tell that Edward of yours that the Army is looking to him as the only man who can rid them of Squiff. I know I am not quite an impartial witness as regards your better half; but on the other hand I claim to know the mind of the officers as well as any man alive, and better than many of those who profess to speak for them, and I have been delighted, and astonished, at

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the unanimity with which they approach the present crisis—viz. their contempt and even loathing of Asquith and all his brood and his methods, and their belief and confidence in your Edward.

"So let him go along with the feeling that in annihilating the whole 'Wait and See' crowd he has the Army *solid* behind him."

These feelings penetrated even into Whitehall and made the hesitating Bonar Law debate within himself. In the conversation already quoted, the Colonial Secretary said to John Redmond that he feared an early development.

"I pressed him," Redmond records, "to know what he meant when he said that what he anticipated and indeed what he feared, was that some sort of another reshuffle in the Government was necessary and could not be long avoided.

"I asked him if he meant by this that Asquith should go.

"He said that his own personal opinion was that Asquith was by far the best man for the position, and that the idea which was abroad, that he was vacillating and hesitating on any matter of war policy, was quite untrue. His vacillation and hesitation only concerned the questions of Parliamentary strategy. Although this was his personal opinion, he said that he foresaw that Asquith would probably go.

"I asked him," Redmond continues, "who could possibly take his place. Was it Carson? He said no, that would be impossible even if Carson's health was good. I asked him, was it himself. He again said no, and added that he thought he had become to some extent unpopular in his own party.

"He then said Lloyd George. I asked him what he thought of such an arrangement, and with an expressive gesture he said, 'You know George as well as I do.'"<sup>1</sup>

These changes, however, were still in the womb of future time, and Carson for his part had neither personal ambition for himself nor personal animosity against Mr. Asquith. He had merely reached the conclusion that the war could never be won with so temporising a chief and a policy so supine. He had, indeed, come up to Town to force upon the Government a decision in the most urgent matter then to be decided. To that end, on the

<sup>1</sup> Denis Gwynn, *Life of John Redmond*, p. 466. This conversation took place on 15th March, 1916.

28th of March, 1916, he saw Lord Derby, at that time zealously at work on a last drive for the voluntary system. "I went straight back," Lord Derby wrote to Carson the same day, "to see Walter Long and Bonar Law, and they have arranged what I think is in accordance with your wishes. Walter is to-morrow going to make a full statement as to what the Government are doing to get the single men out of their various hiding places. . . . I told him . . . you would probably ask for a day to consider the whole question and not only the minor part . . . of getting single men . . . I am perfectly prepared to support you in General Compulsion; but I am not prepared to do so on the ground that the Prime Minister's pledge to the married men has not been kept."

Strengthened by such alliances, and by the strong Committee behind him, Carson kept on pressing the Government to a decision. It must have been the staple of the talk on the night of 3rd April when his friends Lord Milner, Amery, Geoffrey Robinson and Oliver dined with him, for on the same night Milner wrote to him:

"One suggestion only with reference to our talk to-night. If L. G. really makes up his mind to come out—which would make a vast difference to the whole position—would it not be well to consult him as to the form of your contemplated resolution? It is important that it should be worded in a way calculated to help him in fighting his battle in the Cabinet, and should be such as he can heartily support against his colleagues, and, subsequently, in the House and in the country."

Mr. Lloyd George, evidently, was threatening resignation; but that, with Mr. Lloyd George, had become a habit. Was he, this time, in earnest? Like Bonar Law he had been watching Carson, and with a wavier eye.

"I am not sure," he had said to his friend Lord Riddell some time previously, "that I should not have resigned with Carson. The public will say he did the right thing. However, now I must wait the turn of events."<sup>1</sup>

He was still waiting the turn of events. Had it come?

That Carson kept on turning the screw upon his old friend, Bonar Law, is suggested by a letter from that Minister of the 4th April.

<sup>1</sup> Lord Riddell's *War Diary*, p. 142 (under date, 11th December, 1915).

"I have," said Bonar with some show of firmness, "your note of yesterday; but there is in the meantime nothing I can add to my previous letter. I then stated that as soon as I was in a position to do so, I should communicate with you with reference to the resolution in favour of general compulsion presented to me by a deputation of your Committee.

"I quite understand the wish of your Committee that there should be an immediate decision on a subject so vital to the conduct of the war; but I think it right to say, and, indeed, I am sure you will agree with me, that I cannot allow myself to be influenced as to the time which seems to me necessary before coming to a decision so momentous, even by my desire to meet your own views and those of the Committee, which, as I know, is largely representative of the Party of which I have the honour to be leader in the House of Commons."

This tenseness spread from the House even to the Front. On, the 10th April, 1916, writing from the 6th Royal Scots Fusiliers "in the Field," Mr. Winston Churchill said:

"I have received other letters from home to confirm your view that a serious crisis may be developing, and I recognise that events may compel you to act.

"I strongly recommend you, when a day is fixed for the compulsion debate, to issue a summons to all military M.P.'s, as was done when the Compulsion Bill was under discussion, urging them to endeavour to be in their places. Cawley should do the same for Liberals. The bulk of them would be able to come and the Army would approve their action. This would add greatly to your strength and facilitate the carrying of what is now a vital measure if the war is to be prosecuted effectually. . . . My feeling is that everything necessary to win the war should be done without regard to old political peace-time opinions. . . ."

On Wednesday, the 12th April, Carson wrote to the Prime Minister to ask "what day next week you propose to make your statement *re* recruiting in the House of Commons, and also what day will be given for a discussion, if such is thought necessary." "I prefer," Carson added, "writing to you to putting questions in the House of Commons. I propose to put down to-day the resolution some of us wish to discuss but of course it may become unnecessary."

"I hope to be able to make the statement on Tuesday," Mr. Asquith replied; "if a discussion is desired, as I suppose certain—whether there be a motion or not, I should think we might take it on Wednesday."

On the 13th the Cabinet met to consider the recruiting question, and what happened Mr. Lloyd George confided to his friends, the journalists—Lord Riddell, Sir William Robertson Nicoll, and C. P. Scott of the *Manchester Guardian*. "The Army Council have made a strong report. We came to no decision. The discussion is adjourned until Monday."

"I thought the Cabinet always decided something," said Riddell, and Lloyd George laughed at the pleasantry.

Then Lloyd George asked his friends whether he should go out.

"Carson," he added, "is improving daily. He is managing his little group with great skill. He is a fine fellow."

"He has no following in the country," Robertson Nicoll objected.

"Perhaps you are right about that," Lloyd George replied. "However I have quite made up my mind. Unless they accept the Army Council recommendations I shall go out on Monday."<sup>1</sup>

On Saturday the 15th April, Bonar Law wrote to Carson again:

"... The Cabinet to decide the question will be held at 4 on Monday and the Unionist Members of the Cabinet are meeting at 2.15 to decide what we shall do.

"I am perfectly free still, but I think we will decide that I cannot break the Government on this issue, and if so we shall probably have a meeting of the House at 12 on Tuesday.

"I shall be glad to speak to you about the whole situation; but I feel that perhaps a meeting might hamper you in the course you think it right to take. . . .

"One of the strangest results of this war is that you and I should be compelled to be more or less on opposite sides; but I know that you intend as strongly as I that nothing of that kind will alter the feelings not only of friendship but of respect which we have always had for each other."

What lay behind these exchanges was probably another

<sup>1</sup> Lord Riddell's *War Diary*, pp. 170-2.

unseen struggle between the Government and the Trade Union leaders, represented in the Cabinet by Arthur Henderson.

On the 18th Bonar Law wrote to Carson again begging for another postponement; on the 19th Mr. Asquith told the House that there were still material points of disagreement in the Cabinet, and that if these points are not settled by agreement the result must be the break up of the Government. "As the Cabinet was united in believing that such an event would be a disaster of the most formidable kind," it proposed a few more days of deliberation and would meet the House again on the 25th.

On the 20th Bonar Law wrote again to Carson:

"We have come to an agreement and I enclose it. This is the proposal arranged between the Army Council and Henderson and both accept it.

"It will be announced and a statement with discussion will take place on Tuesday in a secret session, and, of course, if you wish to move your motion, it can be done next day. . . ."

Mr. Winston Churchill had returned from the Front to take his share in the debate. "E. and I dined with the Winston Churchills," Lady Carson noted in her Diary. "Who would have thought that could ever have happened? He talks an awful lot and gave me the impression his tongue works faster than his brain, though it goes pretty fast."

Neither Carson nor his friends had much hope of the Secret Session.

"My forecast is," Lord Milner wrote to Carson on the 24th April, 1916, "that both your audience and mine [the House of Lords] will be pretty well fogged. Evidently we have been diddled again and the Government are going in for another half measure. They have been driven *volentes volentes*, to accept the principle of all-round compulsion; but having it, they will naturally carry it out as lamely and as clumsily as possible. Still they will make a pretence of doing 'all that is necessary,' 'all that the Army Council has asked for,' etc., and our wobblers will be anxious to try and believe them.

"The atmosphere, therefore, is not likely to be favourable to aggressive tactics. At the same time I don't myself feel inclined to pretend that a sham is anything else but a sham. . . ."

The Secret Session did not altogether fulfil these expectations, at least in the House of Commons. "Edward went down to the 'secret session,'" Lady Carson noted in her Diary for that day—it was Tuesday, 26th April, 1916—"I rang up the Whip's room and Mr. Bridgeman told me Edward had made a wonderful speech."

The Government proposals offended the general temper of the House. They were based upon a whole series of compromises. The service of time-expired men was to be extended for a year; the Military Authorities were to be given power to transfer men from Territorial battalions to any unit where they were needed; exempted men were to be liable to military service on the expiry of their term of exemption; all youths as they reached the age of eighteen were to be brought under the Military Service Act, and as these measures were likely to be inadequate, the Government proposed to make a fresh effort to obtain by voluntary enlistment more unattested married men. If by the 27th May 50,000 men were not secured the Government would ask Parliament for compulsory powers—and so forth.

On the 27th April, when the House met again in public, Mr. Walter Long asked leave to introduce a Bill founded on these proposals. Carson listened grimly as his old friend gave an account of its provisions.

"After listening to my right honourable friend," said Carson, when the President of the Local Government Board had finished, "I can only express my surprise when I am told that we are to pass this Bill in one day's Committee."

"I did not say that," said Mr. Long, "I only expressed a hope."

"I can only assure my right honourable friend," Carson retorted, "that it is a hope which will be disappointed."

And then Carson proceeded, with the applause of the whole House, to scarify the Government proposals. "I am in favour," he said, "of compulsion owing to the exigencies of the war; but I am not in favour of the unfair compulsion that is put in this Bill. Anything more unfair, anything more illogical, anything more unreasonable than the proposals which the Government put forward in this Bill I cannot conceive."

Nothing could be meaner, he went on, than to propose to

coerce time-expired soldiers before the Government had compelled those who had not served to take their share. "Of course," he said, "these men have no Trade Union . . . what is the difference between the man at the Front and the man who is making munitions here? The difference in the eyes of the Government is this, that if the man at the Front does not go on to parade when he is ordered into the trenches they shoot him; but if the man who is making ammunition goes out and downs tools they give him five shillings a day more rather than lose his work."

He did not believe that the sense of justice of that House had become so degraded that they would for one moment assent to a proposition of that kind.

Nor was it. So plain was the feeling in all quarters of the House that the Prime Minister thought it wise to withdraw the Bill. He was an old Parliamentarian; he could see what the House felt about the Bill; it was not weakness but wisdom on the part of the Government to acquiesce in the determination of the Commons. Mr. Long accordingly asked leave to withdraw his request for permission to introduce the Bill, and the House agreed to its withdrawal without a dissentient voice.

"They have brought in the Military Bill for the time-expired men and Edward made them throw it out," Lady Carson recorded. "He says no Prime Minister has ever been placed in such a humiliating position as Asquith."

Sir Edward Carson, however, was pressing neither for triumph for himself nor for the humiliation of the Prime Minister. Five days later when Mr. Asquith described a new Bill for the establishment of Universal Compulsory Service and took occasion to explain that the previous measure had been adopted to meet the views of the Labour representatives, Carson warmly welcomed the measure and regretted only that it had not been introduced at an earlier stage of the war. The crisis was over. When Mr. Lloyd George spoke next to his friend Riddell on the subject, it was to say, "I don't want anything to happen just now; the time is not ripe. I doubt if a new Government could last for three months."

## CHAPTER XVI

### *An Irish Easter Week*

News from Dublin – Mr. Birrell and Lord Wimborne – Liberty Hall – Irish National Volunteers – Sinn Féin – Easter Week – De Valera – John Dillon – Mr. Asquith in Ireland.

ON the morning of the 25th April, 1916, Colonel Sharman Crawford came to Carson's house at 5 Eaton Place with strange news of Ireland. He had crossed in the last boat from Dublin. Sir Roger Casement had been caught running guns and ammunition into Ireland from Germany and was safe in London; but Dublin was in the hands of the Sinn Feiners. They had taken over the stations, blown up the railway lines, burnt a theatre and shot people in the streets. They had cut the cable; the town was in an uproar. In Ulster all was quiet. "What a contrast," Lady Carson notes in her diary, "Edward thinks it possible we ought to go over to Ulster to-morrow. . . ."

"We were to have gone over to Ulster to-day," she noted again on the 27th; "but no boats are running and all is quiet in Ulster."

On the 28th came more news, this time from Sir Henry Wilson's brother, J. M. Wilson, who had just come over from Dublin. Part of the city was still in the hands of the rebels; the soldiers had brought in artillery, and there had been a "fearful bombardment." Then came Colonel Watt with news that 17 officers and 200 men had been killed and wounded; but that they had killed many Sinn Feiners. "The War Office," Lady Carson noted, "sent for Edward. He told them if it was necessary he would go straight to Ulster. The Government are going to send us direct."

These thronging and turbulent events had long been prepared by the boldness of faction and the weakness of Government. The British Executive in Ireland, under notice to quit, had fallen into decrepitude, and were much under the influence of their heirs



presumptive, the Irish Nationalist Party. Lord Wimborne, who had succeeded Lord Aberdeen at Viceregal Lodge, was a cipher in the Administration; Mr. Birrell was the source of policy, but the Chief Secretary was much in London, and had perforce to leave the administration in the hands of a permanent official, the Under-Secretary, Sir Matthew Nathan, who assiduously and apologetically ran the Administration at Dublin Castle.

How low this Administration was fallen had been shown in the time of his predecessor, when Sir James Dougherty refused to be responsible for any measures to stop a thousand men armed with rifles marching from Larne on Dublin in broad day. The Assistant Commissioner of Police, Mr. Harrel, who had shown himself equal to the emergency, had been broken at the first breath of political censure and Sir John Ross-of-Bladensburg, the Commissioner, had resigned in protest. From that time—and indeed for some time before—Dublin had lain at the mercy of an armed mob.

In the winter of 1913 Jim Larkin, then paralysing Dublin by a series of strikes, organised what he called a citizen army of labourers and cornerboys, whom he dressed in green uniforms and armed with rifles and revolvers, and established in headquarters at "Liberty Hall." This armed mob, which was continued into the war under the congenial rule of James Connolly, never numbered more than two hundred men. More popular in numbers and in organisation were the Irish or as they were popularly called the Sinn Féin Volunteers.

In my previous volume I gave some account of that mixed, ill-disciplined and ill-conducted force, the Irish National Volunteers, over which several political and secret societies, the United Irish League, the Ancient Order of Hibernians and the Irish Republican Brotherhood struggled darkly for control. Of this "Army," although it had been created against his will, by men hostile to his party, John Redmond had gained a precarious measure of command before the war; it was with these volunteers that he proposed to defend the shores of Ireland against the invader.

John Redmond, however, was unlucky in this adventure from the start. He could not provide his volunteers with arms. He first applied to the War Office, and was told, reasonably enough,

that every available rifle was required for the Regular Army. As a matter of fact the British Government had no reason to trust these Volunteers. "Would these men allow themselves to be disarmed at the end of the war?" J. Mackay Wilson wrote to Carson: "Enrolling these men would be a cause of the utmost menace to scattered loyal people, especially in Connaught. I know what I am writing about." Grattan's Volunteers, on whom they were modelled, were not, for the British Government, an encouraging precedent.

Despairing of Whitehall, Redmond turned to the United States. In September 1914, he wrote to Michael J. Ryan, "National President of the United Irish League of America." After telling Ryan that "the general sentiment of our people is unquestionably on the side of England in this war," and that an Irish Brigade was being recruited for the Regular Army, Redmond proceeded to ask for money to arm his Volunteers. "I need not point out to you," he wrote, "what a source of enormous strength this will be to us if any attempt be made by any party—which personally I think most unlikely—to tamper with the Home Rule Act."

The reply of Mr. Ryan was, to say the least of it, chilly. "Mr. Fitzpatrick (the Treasurer) and I," he wrote, "are agreed in opinion that no money worth speaking of can be raised in this country from the Irish people to even indirectly aid England." For himself, he had given one hundred dollars to the German Fund—"all my sympathies are with Germany, and I believe that nine-tenths of the Americans of *Irish blood* think as I do."<sup>1</sup>

Thus Redmond could arm his Volunteers neither from England nor from America. Moreover he commanded a wasting force. The best part of them enlisted in the Irish regiments of the British Army; of those who remained some fell away and others drifted into the opposite camp. For when Redmond had declared himself as a loyal subject in August 1914 the original members of the Governing Committee had repudiated his command and formed their own force under the name of the Irish Volunteers, popularly known from the watchword of their party as Sinn Feiners. By the end of October 1915 these were 18,000 strong, 2,000 of them in Dublin, and they had over 1,400 rifles and many

<sup>1</sup> Denis Gwynn, *Life of John Redmond*, p. 417 et seq.

revolvers. No doubt this outward split reflected an inward rivalry which had always existed for the secret control of the Volunteers. The Hibernians under Joseph Devlin adhered to the Irish Nationalist Party; the Irish Republican Brotherhood were the enemies inveterate and implacable not merely of England but of any Constitutional party. "In August 1914," as P. S. O'Hegarty reports, "a meeting of its supreme Council was held at which the decision was taken to make an insurrection before the end of the war; and upon that all its energies were bent."<sup>1</sup>

These rebels, as they were from the start, held their drills and parades in the streets and squares of Dublin; unarmed at first but, growing bolder with immunity, then with rifles and revolvers. They held their own recruiting rallies and broke up the recruiting meetings of the Loyalists. "It is true," said a report which Carson received at that time, "that they are but a small minority of the inhabitants of Dublin City; but they are just that body which has always been at the bottom of all the trouble. In times of political or trade disturbances this mob of reckless roughs has been held in check by the police, with staves and truncheons. Now they are armed more or less efficiently with rifles and bayonets and a certain amount of ammunition, and the police are required to stand at these meetings listening to grossly illegal language, delivered in front of a sort of fortress, garrisoned by armed men. . . ."

Sir Matthew Nathan would do nothing or next to nothing. Major Ivor Price, of the Royal Irish Constabulary, Intelligence Officer to the Irish Command, testified afterwards that "the Irish Government were guided by the opinion of outsiders and not always by the opinion of their subordinates who supplied the information," and Nathan himself admitted that he relied for information on Messrs. Devlin, Dillon and Redmond, but chiefly on John Dillon. As for Dillon, his sympathies were with Germany; "he felt already," says Mr. Denis Gwynn, "that Ireland ought, in self defence, to cause England embarrassment until Irish demands were satisfied." It was upon such counsels that Dublin Castle leaned in its administration of Ireland. Even General Friend, who held the Military Command, was brought under the same influence. Thus he proposed to Sir Matthew

<sup>1</sup> *The Victory of Sinn Féin*, p. 2. See also *Life of Carson*, vol. ii., ch. xxvii.

Nathan that they should make a raid for arms on "Liberty Hall," Connolly's headquarters, "but agreed that before any action was taken which might result in a conflict we should consult with the Nationalist leaders. . . ."

They consulted not John Redmond who was much in London but John Dillon, the party manager who felt that his party was losing its grip on political Ireland and feared to do anything that might further diminish this waning popularity. "One unfortunate thing," Major Price reported, "which hindered us a good deal was the attitude of the official Nationalist Party and their Press. Whenever General Friend did anything strong in the way of deporting these men . . . they at once deprecated it, and said it was a monstrous thing to turn a man out of Ireland."<sup>1</sup>

All this is not to suggest that in Easter Week, 1916, Ireland was disaffected. On the contrary, John Redmond had told Ryan the truth when he said that "the general sentiment of our people is unquestionably on the side of England." On the 10th April, 1916, Major Price reported that "the mass of the people are sound and loyal as regards the war," and the rebel O'Hegarty was of the same opinion. "The insurrection," he said, "came upon the people of Ireland like a thunderbolt. They had not been expecting it and they did not want it. . . . The insurrection was therefore universally and explosively unpopular." And again: "The European War had shown Ireland to be less Irish and more Anglicised than ever she had been in her history, had shown Ireland to be more than three-fourths assimilated to England."<sup>2</sup>

Ireland was lightly taxed, prosperous, under an easy Government, with no wrongs to redress, enjoying the freedom and the trade of the British Empire. There was no cause nor even pretext for rebellion.

There were warnings. On 30th March, 1916, there was an uproarious meeting at the Mansion House to protest against two deportations, and the policemen were fired on; on the 17th April there came secret reports of a threatened German landing of arms and munitions on the south-west coast and a rising

<sup>1</sup> Report of the Royal Commission on the Rebellion in Ireland, 1916 (Cd. 8279), p. 7 *et seq.*

<sup>2</sup> *The Victory of Sinn Féin*, p. 3.

timed for Easter eve. Armed pickets of one hundred men each were organised at each of the four main barracks as a precautionary measure. Then on the eve of Good Friday, 21st April, came news of the strange boat capsized on the shore at Ardfert with three pistols and German maps and papers; then the arrest near the spot of Casement, and on Easter eve news of a captured vessel which had hoisted German colours and been sunk by her crew at Daunts Rock near the entrance of Queens-town Harbour.

On Easter Sunday Professor Eoin MacNeill, "Chief of the Staff, Irish Volunteers," issued a notice rescinding all orders for Easter Sunday. The rising evidently was off, but then came a disturbing report of a robbery of gelignite near Dublin. The Lord Lieutenant held a conference on Sunday night; but it was thought rash to take measures to recapture the dangerous stuff. On Monday, as Major Price was talking to Sir Matthew Nathan, he heard firing and saw a policeman lying in a pool of blood with half a dozen Volunteers in green coats dashing about. The rebels were up.

It was a criminal and desperate affair, well planned if the intention was to destroy life and property. The rebels by their first rush had succeeded in seizing the General Post Office in Sackville Street, the Four Courts, Stephen's Green and Jacob's Biscuit Factory. From these and many other points of vantage they fired on everyone in uniform; "not only unarmed officers and police but Army doctors, wounded soldiers in hospital uniform and elderly members of the Veterans' Corps, five of whom were fatally wounded by a volley poured into their defenceless ranks, without warning, by Sinn Feiners in ambush in Haddington Road." Civilians too were murdered in the streets; the scum of Dublin poured out of its slums to loot the shops; fires added to the general terror, and the fire brigade tried in vain to quench the conflagration under the rifles of the Sinn Feiners.

There are among Carson's papers a packet of letters which throw a lurid light upon that terrible Easter Week in Dublin. The Executive, impotent or negligent, had looked on while armed rebels drilled and manœuvred in the streets and squares of the city. The police had warned them of disaffected men in the

railway service; but they took no measures and used no precautions to guard either the lines or the stations. Armed guards were placed in one or two of the public buildings, but were without ammunition; even Kingstown, the key of Ireland, was unwarned and unguarded. One correspondent reported that on Easter Saturday, under the eyes of the police, a large motor lorry, loaded with rifles and ammunition, drew up at the rear of "Liberty Hall" in Beresford Place. The police would have seized it, but as it was guarded by 150 armed men they applied to the Lord Lieutenant for military aid, which was refused them, and the arms were distributed among the rebels.

General Friend, Commanding in Ireland, was away in London on short leave, and did not return until the evening of Tuesday the 25th; the troops at the Curragh and elsewhere awaited his arrival; in the meantime a thousand men armed with rifles and some machine guns held Dublin at their mercy; all services were paralysed, all shops shut or looted; the people were without milk or food and were liable to be shot if they ventured into the streets. They hailed the soldiers as rescuers; but the soldiers, being strangers to Dublin, could not distinguish friends from foes. There were blunders, confusion, and an unauthorised execution.

Eamon De Valera, at that time one of the subordinate leaders, installed himself and his men behind the sacks of Boland's Flour Mill, a high stone building which commanded the road from Kingstown, and made a sad massacre of a newly raised battalion of the Sherwood Foresters, which were marching into the town suspecting no evil. When at last field guns were brought into Dublin to reduce the chief centres of resistance, the rebels surrendered amid the ruin they had created. In town and country the rebellion had cost 450 lives and 2,614 wounded, altogether a bad business, badly handled, which brought authority into hatred and disrepute, and left rankling resentment behind it.

John Dillon, in the midst of it, a helpless prisoner with his family in their house in North Great George's Street, wrote letters when he could find the opportunity to John Redmond in Dublin, and still aspired to direct policy amid the ruins both

of his party and his quarter of the town. "The heart of the city," he wrote to Redmond, "is burnt out, including the *Freeman* Office." And again: "You ought not to be any party to or tolerate in any degree any patchwork settlement. We have had enough of that kind of work. We should state our terms and if the Government won't accept them, wash our hands of all responsibility and warn the Government in the most emphatic terms that we shall be obliged to adopt a hostile attitude. . . ." And Dillon proceeded to nominate the new holders of the principal offices of Government, beginning with "the removal of Campbell." "Campbell must go," he wrote on 3rd May, "as a mark and sign that we are to be masters; failing that we must be free to attack the Government in and out of the House. . . ."<sup>1</sup>

If Mr. Asquith had only known, Mr. Redmond was, as someone described him at that time, like the Dublin Post Office, an imposing façade on Sackville Street but within an empty shell. It was besides, in Ireland, a fatal thing to make concession to violence. Yet on the 11th May, in a statement to the House of Commons, the Prime Minister precipitated the question of Home Rule upon the ruins of the Irish Nationalist Party and of Dublin. "The Government," he said, "had come to the conclusion that the system had broken down, and that the only possible alternative, in their judgment, is the creation, at the earliest possible moment, of an Irish Government responsible to the Irish people." To that end no Chief Secretary was to be appointed in place of Mr. Birrell (who had resigned); but by agreement between different parties in Ireland, the Government of Ireland Act was to be "put into operation at the earliest possible moment."

Then Mr. Asquith went over to Ireland, and when he was in Dublin paid a visit to the prisoners at Richmond Barracks. It may be, as his biographer says, that his intention was merely to satisfy himself as to their comfort; but the effect was political, instantaneous and disastrous. "The prisoners," says Professor Alison Phillips, "who had been depressed and in some cases penitent and in tears, saw that they had not fought in vain, and Mr. Asquith had scarcely left the prison before they were insulting

<sup>1</sup> Denis Gwynn, *Life of John Redmond*, p. 474 et seq.

their guards, throwing up their caps and shouting victory.”<sup>1</sup> To modify policy as a result of violence, to pay the appearance of court to rebels, these, and not the execution of the ring-leaders, were the psychological errors which brought to ruin the precarious edifice of Constitutional Government in Ireland.

<sup>1</sup> *The Revolution in Ireland*, p. 108.



## CHAPTER XVII

### *Heart-breaking Matters*

Birrell resigns - John Dillon - Forward Lloyd George - Carson and Ulster -  
The six counties.

"My first thought," Carson said some time afterwards, "when I heard of this rebellion, was, 'That is the end of Home Rule.' " He was to be undeceived; but in the meantime he had reassuring news of Ulster. Sir George Richardson, still in charge of the Ulster Volunteer Force, had put himself in touch with General Hackett Pain, Commanding in Belfast, and had placed the Force at the disposal of the authorities. Guards were put on the armouries to prevent the possibility of a Sinn Féin raid; a flying column was organised by the Ulster Volunteer Force Motor Corps; the Commanders were brought together and instructed to maintain strict discipline, especially in the shipyards, and as a result of these precautions the General was able to furnish troops for Dublin and denude the City even of police. "The Commissioner," a friend reported to Carson, "did not even think it necessary to close the pubs, and everything went on the same as usual." The North at least was safe.

On the 3rd May, 1916, Mr. Birrell made known his resignation to the House of Commons. He mournfully confessed that he had made "an untrue estimate of this Sinn Féin movement." It might have been wise to disarm it; but if he had refrained, it was to maintain the unanimity of Ireland. The morning before he had driven down from the Phoenix Park for the last time through all the familiar streets of Dublin; he had viewed the smoking ruins of a great portion of Sackville Street "when I was surrounded by my own ruins in my own mind," and "the one ray of comfort was that there had been no Irish rebellion, that Irish soldiers were still earning themselves glory in all the fields of war, that over these ashes hands might be shaken and new bonds of union forged."

It was a statement which left no room for recrimination, nor was Carson lacking in magnanimity. "I can assure him," he said, "that many of us on this side, and many of his bitterest opponents in Ireland, will recognise that this misfortune has come upon the country, and has come upon his career, rather through his desire to preserve that . . . common front to our enemies abroad than from any dereliction of duty on his part." As for the conspiracy, it had "nothing to do with either of the political parties in Ireland," and although it ought to be put down with courage and determination, "it would be a mistake to suppose that any true Irishman calls for vengeance." It would be a matter requiring the greatest wisdom and the greatest coolness.

Carson could at least find comfort in the knowledge that the rebellion had failed; what filled him with disquiet was the policy of the Government, the temporising mind of Mr. Asquith.

John Dillon had blown over from Ireland to throw himself upon the Government with the fury of a whirlwind. In his speech of the 11th May he had accused them of drenching Ireland in a sea of blood. He was proud of these men, he said; it was not murderers who had been executed; it was insurgents who had fought a clean fight, a brave fight, however misguided. And he made the most and the worst of the unauthorised execution of Sheehy Skeffington. Mr. Asquith had blenched before the assault, and had gone over to Ireland to arrive at "some arrangement for the future which may commend itself to the general consent."

On the 22nd May, 1916, Sir Edward Carson had from Mr. Bonar Law a letter which must have given him further cause for thought. "If there is to be a Liberal Chief Secretary," said Mr. Bonar Law, "I think the only reasonable one is L. G. . . .

"I tried to get you this morning to know what you think of that, but, as I could not get you, I sounded George and suggested it to him from myself alone.

"He is, I think, inclined to consider it; but would like to see you, and, if you think it right, James Craig. . . .

"I am sure he would not think of going unless he believed that the big question could be settled."

Carson could hardly have supposed that Mr. Lloyd George

was equal to the settlement of the "big question"; but whatever his doubts may have been they could not retard the course of events. On the 25th May, 1916, in the House of Commons, the Prime Minister made a statement which put, or seemed to put, the line of policy beyond all doubt.

Mr. Asquith had come back from Ireland with "two dominant impressions." The first was "the breakdown of the existing machinery of Irish Government"; the second that "we have now a unique opportunity for a new departure." The Government of Ireland Act, he pointed out, was on the Statute Book; no one had ever desired to coerce one set of Irishmen against another; what was wanted was an agreement between those representing the different interests and parties in Ireland. The Government—"I speak for the whole of my colleagues"—were anxious to facilitate such a result. And who but Mr. Lloyd George was equal to such a task? At the unanimous request of his colleagues, his right hon. friend, the Minister of Munitions, had undertaken to devote his time and his energy and his power to the promotion of that desire. In the meantime Mr. Asquith appealed to all sections of the House to abstain from injurious comment.

In these decisions it is probable that America played a part. "The Irish Americans had," as the British Ambassador reported, "taken service under the Germans." They might even decide the Presidential election. On the 19th May, 1916, Sir Cecil Spring-Rice wrote to Sir Edward Grey: "If we are able to settle the Home Rule question at once, the announcement will have a beneficial effect here, although I do not think that anything we could do would conciliate the Irish here. They have blood in their eyes when they look our way."<sup>1</sup>

The matter, whatever the reason, had been settled, as Mr. Asquith suggested, and as Carson supposed, with the unanimous consent of the Government, Unionists as well as Liberals. If he resented that decision he concealed his resentment. "Since this dreadful calamity came upon Ireland," he said, "I have found great difficulty myself in restraining my own feelings, as regards the attacks that are daily made and the challenges made daily in the Press. Whenever I feel inclined to answer, I

<sup>1</sup> *Letters and Friendships of Sir Cecil Spring-Rice*, vol. ii., pp. 200 *et seq.*

always say to myself, 'Remember there is a war going on in which our country is engaged.' "

It must have seemed to Carson, then, that to make the best bargain for his friends in Ireland was all that remained for him to do. Ronald McNeill found him at that time sitting in one of the lobbies of the House, with his head in his hands. "What is the matter?" he asked, and Carson replied that he had been asked by Lloyd George to see him on the Ulster question, and when he (Carson) had offered to put the case for the Loyalists of the South, he had been told that they were to be separately represented. There is, besides, a recorded conversation between Carson and a deputation from the South and West of Ireland, in which he put the conclusions to which he had been forced.

Carson began by asking them, if they did not settle what was the alternative.

"Let us go on as we have been going," the deputation replied.

"What does that mean?" Carson asked them. "Do you mean to the end of the war?"

"For all time," they replied.

"How are you to get rid of the Home Rule Act, which is on the Statute Book?" he asked.

"Well even until the end of the war," they said.

"Do you want Mr. Birrell back?" was Carson's next question.

"No, we want a strong man," they said.

"Where is he in this Government?" Carson rejoined, and he added—"Don't you know perfectly well that the men who will appoint your Chief Secretary are the eighty Irish Nationalist Members in the House of Commons?"

The game was up in Carson's judgment; but he could still make terms—and his main idea was the exclusion of Ulster from a Home Rule settlement. That, at least, he felt he could get then; it was doubtful if he could get it later.

There is evidence that Sir Edward Carson and Mr. Lloyd George met immediately upon the Prime Minister's announcement. Carson, however, made it clear that he was no plenipotentiary; the decision lay, not with him, but with the people of Ulster, and on that basis he stipulated that there should be no return to the old conditions of the Buckingham Palace Conference—"bits of counties here and bits of counties there,

a tessellated pavement with a bit in and a bit out." It must be a clean cut, a clean cut of six counties—so much he would submit to the people of Ulster. It must be a clean cut and it must also be permanent; there must be no sentence of death with a stay of execution.

To all this Mr. Lloyd George agreed, and so that there should be no doubt on the most crucial point of the negotiation, the Minister of Munitions wrote the following letter:

" Whitehall Place, S.W.

" *May 29th, 1916.*

" MY DEAR CARSON,—I enclose Greer's draft propositions.

" We must make it clear that at the end of the provisional period Ulster does not, whether she wills it or not, merge in the rest of Ireland.

" Ever sincerely,

" D. LLOYD GEORGE.

" Will you show it to Craig ? "

The draft terms which accompanied this letter provided that the Government of Ireland Act was to come into operation as soon as possible after the passing of the Bill; but was not to apply to an excluded area, to consist of the six counties of Antrim, Armagh, Down, Tyrone, Fermanagh, and Londonderry, including the Parliamentary boroughs of Belfast, Londonderry and Newry, which was to be administered by a Secretary of State, with officers in no way responsible to the new Irish Government.

The number of Irish representatives in the United Kingdom was to remain unaltered (at 108); the Irish House of Commons was to consist of the members who sat in the British House of Commons, except of course the excluded area, and the Irish Senators were to be nominated by the Lord Lieutenant, subject to instructions from His Majesty.

The term of exclusion for the six counties was much less explicit in the draft than in the accompanying letter. It was to be during the continuance of the war and for twelve months thereafter or for such time as might be necessary to enable Parliament to make further provision. There was also mention of an Imperial Conference at the close of the war, where and

when "the permanent settlement of Ireland should be considered."

But Carson, in a memorandum, insisted on the point: "The six counties are to be excluded from the Government of Ireland Act and are not to be included unless at some future time the Imperial Parliament pass an Act for that purpose."

Carson, moreover, was given reason to suppose that he could get favourable terms for the Southern Unionists. Thus Mr. Lloyd George wrote to him on the 3rd June, 1916:

"I think it is most important that the Unionist minority should be adequately represented in the provisional Parliament at Dublin as well as in the Executive. I therefore suggest that instead of having a separate House during the Provisional period the Government nominees should sit in the first Chamber. We might then arrange that in the Lower Chamber there should be twenty or thirty, or even more, leading representatives of the minority and that in the Executive or Cabinet there should be at least two Protestant Unionists. This would be much more valuable than to pack these men into a separate Chamber. When the time comes to consider the permanent settlement all this can be readjusted; but I feel that the presence of a powerful minority in the Lower Chamber would give the Protestant Unionists the greater confidence at this period."

Then Lloyd George made appeal to Carson on patriotic grounds:

"This terrible disaster in the North Sea makes it more necessary than ever that we should get Ireland out of the way in order to press on with the war. We are losing on all fronts, and now, alas, comes this omen from the sea, where we all thought we were reasonably secure. The management of the war on the part of the Allies is fortuitous and flabby, and unless something is done immediately the British Empire and civilisation will sustain the greatest disaster since the days of Attila. I must therefore have a talk with you with a view to taking immediate action to force a decisive change in the control of the war. An appreciation of the situation by the General Staff has just come into my hands. It has filled me with gloomy forebodings. There is no time to lose. I must have a talk with you on Monday not only about Ireland but about the whole position, before you

leave for Belfast. Let us settle Ireland promptly. It will give us both strength and foothold to insist upon essential changes in other spheres."

Something of what passed at this meeting between Lloyd George and Carson is on record. "My last words to Mr. Lloyd George before I left England," Carson told the Ulster Unionist Council, were—"if anything comes of these suggestions let me implore of you one thing—Do guarantee the people of the rest of Ireland that the Imperial Government will do its part under the Home Rule Act; do, for heaven's sake, administer your police and your forces of the Crown without the interference of political corruption." And again: "The least you can do for these people is to take care that the police, for whom you are responsible, and the forces of the Crown, will give to the people of the South and West that protection of life and property which is the very first element of civilised government."

Carson laid the draft terms before the Ulster Unionist Council in the Ulster Hall, Belfast, on the 6th June, 1916. It was plain from his speech that he had no liking for the task; but he made the best of his case. He spoke of difficulties with America which a settlement might tend to allay, of the over-ruling urgency of the war, of the fact that the Government were agreed upon settlement, including our "hitherto most trusted leaders." . . . "Under these circumstances," he continued, "how are you ever going to get the Home Rule Act off the Statute Book? . . . Do not let us live in a fool's paradise. We are men; we are not schoolboys. . . ."

Then he went into the question of the unit to be excluded. If they got the whole of Ulster, in which there were 896,000 Protestants and 700,000 Catholics, in their Parliamentary representation they would be in a minority of one; in the six counties, with 825,000 Protestants and 482,000 Catholics, they would have a Parliamentary majority of seven.

They might say—better Home Rule than the six counties; but—and here Carson came to the kernel of his policy—there were "great fundamental Imperial reasons" for the other course:

"What becomes of Ireland as a nation? What becomes of a step towards separation, when you leave a British Government

over 1,250,000 people in this island? All these dreams will be gone, and you would be governed absolutely independent, both legislatively and executively, of the Parliament in Dublin."

They might say they would rather fight—at the end of the war. "I tell you honestly," he argued with them, "I was as keen on the rifles and Volunteers as ever a man was, and am still if I had the same conditions; but I tell you it would be madness for us to think we should ever ask our men to come out and fight against British soldiers, who have fought the battle of the Empire with our men at the front in Flanders.

"They will come and ask you, 'What are you fighting for?' and we will say, 'For Ulster.'

"They will say, 'You were offered six counties, clean and free, under British Government on Irish soil, with a refuge and haven for any man that felt himself ill-treated elsewhere, and you would not have it. You would rather go on and rather fight, and that is your contribution to the settlement of Imperial questions at the end of the war. It is not possible. I tell you it is not possible.'"

At this point in his speech, Carson was handed a telegram. He paused, and then read it to the Council. It was to the effect that the *Hampshire*, with Lord Kitchener and his Staff on board, had been lost west of the Orkneys. "Gentlemen," he added, "every day we have heart-breakings over these matters, and these things make us think, and think seriously."

No need to follow the speech further. None of them liked it any more than the man who made it; but they looked at the facts and dourly agreed that Carson was logical.

The representatives of the Ulster counties which were to be abandoned, Monaghan, Donegal and Cavan, held a subsequent meeting. It was no light matter for them; they had reason to fear for their lives and their property; they were, besides, Covenanters, and could, had they insisted, have kept the majority to the strict terms of their oath; but Carson put it to them, that for the common good, in that evil situation, it was best that there should be, not a weak and precarious Ulster, but a "strong haven of refuge" in the six counties. And they sorrowfully agreed.

At a second meeting of the Ulster Unionist Council, on the



12th June, 1916, Lord Farnham, on behalf of these delegates of the three counties, put a resolution protesting against Home Rule and against their exclusion from Ulster; but "if the six counties consider the safety of the Empire depends on the continuance of the negotiations on the basis suggested by the Government, the responsibility must be clearly understood to be theirs, and the delegates of the three counties must abide by their decision."

It was a painful dilemma for all of them. "Men not prone to emotion," Ronald McNeill wrote of that meeting, "shed tears."<sup>1</sup> The majority liked it as little as the minority, and it says much for both that in agreeing to separate they held together. It was upon an appeal to reason which Carson made to them, that "to have a strong Ulster here . . . a strong impregnable Ulster, which would be a haven for all those who thought they would be more happy within these borders," was, upon the whole, the better course or the lesser evil.

"Let them ask themselves, as I have often asked myself," Carson argued, "'How will I lead the Opposition, and how will I carry out such a movement in Ulster as will get us even such proposals as they are about to reject, if they do reject them to-day?'"

And he went on:

"It is no use taking a heroic line, and being a hero for a moment; and saying, 'We will have nothing.' If I said that, I have no doubt I would have got rousing cheers from people who have not thought the matter out, but the Leader who goes for cheers, when it is only a temporary triumph, is a poor creature and would be unworthy to be followed."

Thus these Ulstermen came to their decision on what Carson called "these heart-breaking matters."

<sup>1</sup> *Ulster's Stand for Union*, p. 247.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### *Permanent or Provisional ?*

Carson's anxieties – " I feel very lonely " – Walter Long and Lord Selborne – Giving them hell – Treachery suspected – Herbert Samuel – Redmond's plain story – Carson replies.

CARSON, it is plain, was taking a hand in what he took to be a doubtful remedy, in desperate circumstances. The rebellion, as he feared, had only been superficially suppressed. Redmond and his Irish Nationalist Party, a weak bulwark at the best against disorder, were in jeopardy. He had received letters from friends in Dublin which increased his misgivings. They reported truculence in the rebels, law and order broken and defied.

On the 14th June, 1916, two days after his second Ulster meeting, Carson wrote to Bonar Law laying bare his mind and his anxieties. First he expressed himself on the condition of Ireland, as shown in the letters, which he enclosed. He had advised the Irish Attorney-General not to remain accountable for the administration of the Criminal Law in Ireland if things were allowed to go on " with open disloyalty paraded daily before the peaceful inhabitants of the country."

" It is surely the duty of the Government," Carson proceeded, " especially if they are going to bring Home Rule into force in the South and West, to provide for the primary elements of Government in assuring to the people there that Imperial Power will be exercised to preserve them their lives and property. . . . There will be nothing but disaster and chaos and ignominy if the Government's proposals are carried out without any regard for Imperial obligations.

" The first thing necessary in my opinion is to put in command of the Constabulary a man who will, without fear or favour, take care that the police discharge their duties, and also to put as Commander-in-Chief of the forces a man who will be untrammelled and not a politician, such as General Friend has

always been. . . . There is the whole western coast to be thought of, and especially the coast of Donegal, with its large bay leading into Lough Swilly, where the *Audacious* was mined, and where at any time, in the event of the Germans getting round, our fleet may have to find a base of operations."

Carson turned from these general anxieties to tell his friend about his own part in the business.

"For my own part," he continued, "I have had a very painful and difficult task in trying to induce the six counties to accept the terms the Government have offered; but I think it is due not only to these people but also to the whole of the loyal population of Ireland, which includes at all events some Nationalists, that the Imperial Government should take some responsibility in protecting them.

"The statement that the Prime Minister made with the concurrence of the Cabinet in the House of Commons astonished me. That the Dublin Castle system had broken down was only true in the sense that Birrell, no doubt with the connivance of the Prime Minister, had abrogated all the functions of government entrusted to him, but as the statement was made with the consent of the Unionist Members of the Cabinet, I had no alternative but to do my best, especially as I was told the necessities of the war imposed this duty upon me, and of course, as the Home Rule Act was on the Statute Book, all I could do was to try and save something out of the wreckage, once you had all agreed that a settlement must be come to.

"I feel very lonely in the whole matter; but I have found confidence reposed in me in the North of Ireland, which was, to say the least of it, refreshing. I have heard some rumour to-day that the Cabinet have known nothing about the negotiations or the terms; but that I do not credit, as I do not suppose I should have been asked to go to Ireland and carry out a most distasteful mission in such circumstances, more especially as the papers have given daily accounts of the negotiations which were going on. I have been told that the London *Daily Express* voices your views, and of course I do not know whether that is true, but it has certainly done its best to put us in grave difficulties."

Those rumours which Carson did not credit were, nevertheless, gaining ground. On the 15th June, his friend Somerset Saunderson

wrote to him that he had been to see Walter Long, who told him that Lloyd George's proposals had never been before the Cabinet. Walter Long would resign "unless it was made clear that he was not a party to forcing us to accept Home Rule now, and I surmise that Lloyd George will have to make the admission that his proposals had never been before the Cabinet as he had led us to understand."

The mystery deepened. On the 17th June, 1916, Lord Selborne wrote to Carson from his house in Mount Street:

"Walter Long has told me that Lloyd George has told you that the Cabinet have agreed that the Government of Ireland Act must, with certain modifications, be brought at once into operation, and that he used certain arguments to you in enforcing this view. I have never been more astonished in my life. I repudiate the alleged arguments and as to Lloyd George's scheme—explained to me by Long—not only have I never agreed to it but I have never been asked to agree to it.

"Lloyd George has made no proposals whatever to the Cabinet. He was asked to try and effect a settlement between the Irish Unionists and Nationalists subject of course to the approval of the Cabinet; but what did I understand by 'a settlement'? One for the exclusion from the operation of the Government of Ireland Act of Ulster or of part of Ulster. If an agreement was reached an Amending Act was to be passed during the war; but none of us Unionists in the Cabinet contemplated for a moment that either the principal Act or the Amending Act would come into operation until after the conclusion of the war. I could not possibly warn you because I did not even know that Lloyd George had formulated such a scheme in his own mind."

Carson had already written to Walter Long to complain that he had not been informed of all this by the Unionist Members of the Government when the Prime Minister made his statement, saying that they were all agreed. Walter Long replied angrily (on the 17th June): "The Cabinet had not agreed to Mr. Lloyd George's scheme; the difference with America had never even been discussed in regard to Ireland. As for his Unionist colleagues—'they are surprised that you did not consult them before putting before the Unionist Council a statement which

has naturally and inevitably brought down upon them, and especially upon myself, the gravest possible condemnation.' "

At the same time, Alexander McDowell, the Belfast solicitor, reported an interview with Walter Long which reduced this indignation to its proper proportions.

His general attitude, McDowell reported, seemed inconsistent: "He appeared to think we had been misled by an undue importance being placed on the general attitude of America. I told him that had been mentioned by you as it had been stated to you; but that you did not attach much importance to it and thought that it was more due to funk than anything else; but that what you and the Ulster people attached importance to was the unanimous view of the Cabinet that a settlement of this domestic difficulty would certainly facilitate the winning of the war, and I asked pointedly was that the correct view of the Cabinet attitude.

"He admitted it was, and I said I thought then all this talk about America should be dropped. . . ."

Such reports must have greatly disturbed Carson; but he held to the line he had taken. Bonar Law, who supported Lloyd George, wrote him on the 19th June: "You and I worked with such complete agreement that I am very anxious if it is possible that we should take the same line still, whatever views are taken by your other colleagues." "Before the Cabinet meeting to-day," T. P. O'Connor reported to Redmond on the 21st June, "there was a meeting between Carson and the Unionist Members. My information is that Carson gave them hell, and gave them notice that he was determined to stand by the settlement. This resulted in a division of the Unionist forces. Three have given notice of their resignation—Long, Selborne and Lansdowne; the others will probably stand by Carson; Balfour, Law, Austen and F. E. Smith are certain."<sup>1</sup>

Thus the question divided the Government. Lord Lansdowne wrote a minute on one side; Mr. Balfour on the other. It was common ground, the latter pointed out, that the reversal of Home Rule policy was not in question. Lord Selborne, for example, had stated in the most explicit terms that there was no guarantee which he would not be prepared to give that a Home

<sup>1</sup> Denis Gwynn, *Life of John Redmond*, p. 511.

Rule Parliament should be established immediately after the war, though he would rather resign than set it up a moment earlier. Mr. Balfour's feeling was rather the other way:

"If we must have Home Rule, let us at least exclude from its operation as much of Unionist Ireland as possible." Lloyd George's scheme "would have permanently secured" to six Ulster counties—by consent and without bloodshed—"their place in the United Kingdom."

Would anybody assert that, if the settlement of their fate were to be deferred till peace was declared, terms equally good could be obtained without a dangerous struggle ?

As for the South and West, Mr. Balfour thought that it was safer to trust the Irish Nationalists during than after the war, since the Imperial Government would retain control both of the troops and the police.

Mr. Balfour's logic did not reconcile his friend Lord Selborne, who resigned from the Government, but it prevailed over Walter Long, who remained. Meanwhile, however, other differences were gathering in another direction. They are, perhaps, not altogether charitably suggested in a warning which Carson received from one Irish friend. "Asquith and Lloyd George," Arthur Samuels wrote, "are deep tricksters. For you the exclusion is to be permanent. For Redmond provisional." It would certainly seem that Mr. Redmond regarded the exclusion of the six counties as a temporary measure, and that he entered negotiations upon that basis. The proposals actually published on the 12th June go to confirm that impression. Mr. Redmond recorded in a note made at the time that he and his colleagues had specifically asked Mr. Lloyd George whether they could rely upon him and upon the Prime Minister not to tolerate any further concessions being sprung upon them, and Lloyd George replied that he had "placed his life upon the table and would stand or fall by the agreement come to." Upon that basis, Devlin, like Carson, had gone to Ulster; but whereas Carson had told the Loyalists that the exclusion was to be permanent, Devlin had told the Nationalists that "the arrangement was to be temporary."<sup>1</sup>

John Dillon entertained what T. P. O'Connor called "morbid

<sup>1</sup> *Letters and Leaders of My Day*, vol. ii., p. 571.

suspicious." "You know," he wrote to Redmond on 30th June, "that ever since the P.M. shovelled us on to L. G. and cut off all *direct* communication with us I have all along suspected treachery." And his suspicions were heightened when Lord Lansdowne made a speech giving the Unionist view of the case. Redmond found it more and more difficult to continue the negotiations.

Whatever he may have thought, Carson held to the course he had set for himself. On the 19th of June Tim Healy, with a settlement of his own, went to see him, and found Carson "the same friendly fellow that he had always been, but would not budge an inch. The only thing gained by my visit was tea with Lady Carson, whose father and uncle I knew well."<sup>1</sup> On the other side Sir Henry Wilson's brother, Mackay Wilson, appealed to him to make the truth known. "If I am unreasonable," he wrote, "forgive me; but Sir Edward Carson's name is being bandied about in a way that hurts me."

To these and other friends Carson replied that as the Unionist leaders had not declared their position when Mr. Asquith made his speech, they were responsible for what followed upon it.

Time went on, and in the middle of July a draft Bill was circulated. It came down on the side of Redmond: the provisions as to exclusion, like the rest of the Bill, were temporary and provisional. Mr. Herbert Samuel had been put in charge of it, and his smooth and suave diplomacy broke in oily waves over the rock of Carson's resistance. The correspondence is "personal and private" on the side of the Minister; but its course is sufficiently indicated by a quotation from Carson's replies:

"I quite realise," Carson wrote, "the difficulties you raise; but the one condition on which I agreed to negotiate at all was the exclusion of the six counties. I have never agreed that this should be provisional nor have I any authority to do so, and to leave a suggestion in the Bill that the question of the inclusion was to come up for consideration when the war was over is quite impossible. With new departments and officers created for the Government of the excluded area it would be ludicrous, and there could be no such intention, apart from the assurances given to me."

<sup>1</sup> *Letters and Leaders of My Day*, vol. ii., p. 571.

"The Prime Minister correctly stated what was promised in the answer he gave in the House of Commons to me.<sup>1</sup>

"If we have to fight out the question of the six counties after the war, I really gain nothing by the settlement at all, and the one thing I really want is that the North of Ireland should be allowed to settle down in peace and attend to the development of their industries."

When the Government found that they could not move Carson they turned again to Redmond. On Saturday, the 22nd July, Mr. Lloyd George, by that time Minister for War, and Mr. Herbert Samuel, the Home Secretary, asked him to call and see them at the War Office. It could hardly have been a pleasant interview. The Ministers told Mr. Redmond that two new provisions were to be put in the Bill, one of which was the permanent exclusion of the six Ulster counties.<sup>2</sup>

When Mr. Redmond protested, the two Ministers told him that the decision was absolute, that the decision was final, that they were "simply messengers without any power or authority to discuss these questions in any way whatever."

Mr. Redmond had cause to be sore. He, certainly, had "laid his life upon the table" of these negotiations. He had, in fact, procured agreement upon them in his own party by a threat of resignation. And then to be faced with these changes—as well accept sentence of death ! Indignantly he refused to consider the Bill as amended, and on the Tuesday following, the 25th of July, 1916, he moved the adjournment of the House and stated his case against the Government.

There was dignity, there was even tragedy, in that appearance. His foreboding mind must have already seen in the failure the ruin of his party and of his hopes. Yet he made no personal attack; he told a plain story with a passion restrained—"I will not bandy words about breach of faith or violation of solemn agreement," he said, and then—"Some tragic fatality seems to dog the footsteps of this Government in all their dealings with Ireland."

<sup>1</sup> On 10th July, 1916, the Prime Minister stated that the union of the six counties with the rest of Ireland could only be brought about with, and could never be brought about without, the free will and assent of the excluded area.

<sup>2</sup> The other cut out the provision for the representation of the Irish members in full force in Westminster during the transitory period.



Mr. Lloyd George, in reply, was smooth if evasive. Carson, rose after him, in a strained and crowded House, to tell, like Redmond, "a simple narrative of the facts as I know them." He had not been consulted upon the Prime Minister's statement of the 25th of May, "made on the part of a unanimous Cabinet"; but he could not resist the invitation: "I went, without any ulterior motive whatsoever, except for the sake of the war, into these negotiations," and he added that he had entered into the negotiations for Ulster, and not for the rest of Ireland. He had proposed terms which he could submit to Ulster; he had stipulated that they should be permanent in the sense that they could not be changed without an Act of Parliament. He had put the proposition to Ulster: "I am bound to say they received me as coldly as any audience has ever received any man who had a proposition to put before them"; but when he explained to them the exigencies of the war, and the difficulties of the Empire and the great advantage in the face of our Allies and in the face of the enemy, that they were still a united people—"then I got from them the applause that I knew would lead to their passing of the resolution."

He went back on nothing—"I assure you I have not had altogether a pleasant time. . . . But . . . I adhere to what I did there and the people there adhere to it."

Then Carson paid a tribute to his old opponents, and particularly to Joseph Devlin, "who had played a whole man's part in the matter." "Let us not lose it all now," he went on. And turning full upon Redmond, Carson proceeded:

"Now that the policy has been unanimously declared by the Cabinet and the thing must be settled, it would not be a bad day's work for this country or for Ireland—nor a bad day's work in the war—if the hon. and learned Member for Waterford and myself were to shake hands on the floor of this House."

Carson paused for a response, which was not forthcoming. "The atmosphere," says Mr. Gwynn, "was never more tense in any Irish debate. It required all Redmond's dignity of character to preserve his mask of self-control, as he sat without moving a muscle either in response or repudiation. Carson had scored once more. By that histrionic gesture he had made Redmond appear

before the House of Commons as unwilling to accept the proffered friendship of the Ulstermen.”<sup>1</sup>

Was the gesture “ histrionic ” ? If Redmond had lost, Carson could hardly have felt that he had won.

“ The Act will be the Act there upon the Statute Book,” he said, “ and we will resume our old quarrels over how Ulster is to be excluded. . . . I look forward to it with horror.” If Carson could not foresee the full horror of that resumption, he had already seen enough to make him regret as deeply as Redmond the failure of the settlement. He would have given much for it ; Ulster he would not, he could not, give.

<sup>1</sup> *Life of John Redmond*, p. 522.

## CHAPTER XIX

### *Thiepval*

The 36th Ulsters – Royal farewell – Battle of the Somme – The attack – Hanging on – Heavy losses – The General's letter.

WHILE Carson was fighting for Ulster he had heavy news from France. He had been the inspiration, with James Craig the original cause, of that 36th (Ulster) Division which had sprung into being from the Ulster Volunteer Force. He and his friends had raised, officered, equipped it and provided it with funds. His correspondence from 1914 onwards shows how all ranks looked to him as if he were still their leader. And not they alone; the War Office fell into the habit of writing to him when they wanted recruits or equipment. Thus we find Sir John Cowans, the Quartermaster-General, writing to Carson on the 29th August, 1914, about clothing the soldiers "without coming to us": "As you know permission has been given for you to raise as many battalions as you like of the Royal Irish Rifles and the Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers but . . . we are very pushed in issuing clothing for the new recruits in England and Wales and it would be a great help to us if you could clothe your recruits in service dress or something similar to it. . . ." Then Carson had to help in the recruiting. He went over again for the first Divisional Review at Belfast on May 8th, 1915. "I am so glad you spoke those stirring words to the populace," General Powell wrote to him on the 19th; "they were very much to the point."

At first the troops were distributed for training at Ballykinlar, Clondeboye, Fenner, Randalstown and other camps in the north of Ireland. There was a sickening delay for lack of divisional artillery, and we find some characteristic remarks on the subject by Tim Healy. "The Ulster Force raised by Carson," he writes, "were kept for training at Ballykinlar, Co. Down, nearly a year in the hope that the war would be ended without their having to go to the Front. Some Nationalists argued that

this delay was the result of an arrangement between Carson and the War Office and that no such long training was necessary.”<sup>1</sup>

The truth is otherwise: the officers were urging Carson to use his influence at the War Office to hurry up the artillery, and even small-arms ammunition for practice, so that they could get out to the Front—“in view of the fact,” Lord Leitrim wrote, “that we are constantly told by Inspecting Generals that the Division is more forward in training than many brigades in the First Army.”

“Incidentally—if the 16th Irish Division, so called, is sent out before us, we shall never hear the last of it in Ulster.”

It is evident that Carson acted on these incitements, for on 21st May, 1915, Sir John Cowans wrote from the War Office:

“It was a most extraordinary coincidence just now that I was discussing moves generally—and emphasising the necessity of a very early move for the Ulster Division whilst opening my letters and suddenly came on yours ! That decided me ! And I have told them to put the Ulster Division under Orders to move and it will probably be next week—to Seaford. I must give the Seaford Division time to make billeting arrangements, etc., as it will do them good, staffs and men, to *march* to Aldershot. I hope this will suit your book. I hear they are a splendid lot. . . .”

Intensive training in the Aldershot Command put a fine edge on the 36th. The King himself with Lord Kitchener inspected them on the 30th September, 1915. “Your prompt patriotic answer to the nation’s call to arms,” His Majesty afterwards wrote to them, “will never be forgotten. The keen exertions of all ranks . . . have brought you to a state of efficiency not unworthy of my regular army. . . . In bidding you farewell, I pray God may bless you in all your undertakings.” Carson, too, bade them farewell, and so they went to France in great fettle in the autumn of 1915.

At first the battalions were distributed along the line; but in February 1916 they were brought together under Major-General Nugent, who had succeeded Major-General Powell. On 31st May we find General Nugent writing to Carson in alarm at a rumour that the Division was to be broken up for lack of reserves: “The suggestion,” wrote Nugent, “is to my mind

<sup>1</sup> *Letters and Leaders of My Day*, p. 572.

inconceivable. This Division is admittedly one of the finest in the new Armies. In discipline and physique it is superior to any Division I have seen out here, Regular or New. It is Ulster to the backbone, and full of *esprit de corps*, an all Ulster unit.

"It would be a gross and unmerited insult to Ulster to break it up. . . . I hate asking you to interest yourself in this question, but for the sake of the Division and the Province which raised them, I hope you may be able to ascertain whether the project is really being considered and quash it if it is. . . ."

Thus Carson was expected to watch over the fortunes and the destinies of these fighting Ulstermen, and they never appealed to him in vain.

The great German attack on Verdun in the spring and summer of 1916 had strained the resources of the French Army; on the 25th of June Pétain reported that he could not hold Verdun with the forces under his command and asked that the British Offensive might be advanced. The result was the battle of the Somme of the 1st July, 1916.

It was a great battle along a twenty-mile front, one of those battles Haig was doomed to fight, which bloodily and under the aspect of failure yet achieved its distant and indirect objective. For us the interest is concentrated on that piece of ground in front of Thiepval Wood where lay the 36th Division. Above them on their right was the village of Thiepval, apparently reduced to dust by the preliminary bombardment but still in its deep and well-protected cellars a formidable machine-gun fortress. The rôle of the 36th was not, however, to take the village, but to storm the uplands between it and the river Ancre to the north and penetrate to the second and third enemy positions behind.

The Official Historian of the war, who is never extravagant either in praise or blame, writes with more enthusiasm than he usually allows himself of that assault—how the lines rose and moved forward at a steady pace with the precision of a parade movement—"The scene with the mist clearing off and the morning sun glistening on the long rows of bayonets was brilliant and striking enough. In no formation was religious feeling deeper than in the Ulster Division, all ranks felt that they were engaged in a Holy War under Divine guidance and protection, and

the remembrance that that day was the anniversary of the battle of the Boyne filled every Ulsterman's heart with certainty of victory."<sup>1</sup>

The Ulstermen swept over No Man's Land so close behind the bombardment of their guns that they were into the enemy trenches before the Germans could get well out of their dug-outs, and, sending back their prisoners as they took them, they swept on to the capture of the Schwaben Redoubt which lay between Thiepval and St. Pierre Divion; but these two strong points being still held by the enemy, a terrible flanking fire was poured in upon them from either side. Thus the 108th and the 109th Brigades were brought to a stand; but the 107th which had been held in reserve was sent through them, and advanced with such rapidity that they ran into their own barrage within a hundred yards of the enemy's second position, which nevertheless some survivors reached and entered at several points.

Thus the 36th Division had penetrated between the strongholds of Thiepval and St. Pierre Divion and taken the plateau between and up into the second position, but there they lay strung out on the open ground. The division, says the historian, "resembled a head and shoulders thrust into the German position." It was a head held in chancery by the two strong German points from which, and from the lines still in front, the enemy poured in upon them a converging machine-gun and artillery fire. Thus they hung on, or those who were left of them; many of the battalions had lost all the officers with them; some were mere remnants; ammunition was running short; and the German infantry were pressing in upon the Schwaben Redoubt.

There was no passing the No Man's Land behind them even by single messengers; the one sunken track leading through it was commanded by the machine guns of Thiepval and came to be known as the Bloody Road owing to the mass of dead heaped up in it at the end of the day.

In this terrible position the Ulstermen held on, fighting desperately for the ground occupied, while the British on the right tried in vain to take Thiepval by direct assault. There was,

<sup>1</sup> *Official History of the War: France and Belgium*, 1916, p. 404. On 1st July (Old Style) the battle of the Boyne was fought although the anniversary is nowadays kept on the 12th.

it is said, one point in the day at which Thiepval might have been taken in reverse by the 107th Brigade, but if the chance was given it was missed and in the evening and in the darkness of night what was left of the Division fell back into what was left of Thiepval Wood. As they came in the artillery-men rushed out of the dug-outs in the road banks, and shook hands with them, exclaiming, "Well done, Paddy! You Irish were splendid." "The possibility of breaking the German front," says the Official Historian, "but the impossibility of holding the captured ground when of small area, if the Germans were not inclined to permit it, had once more been demonstrated."

But at a heavy cost. Every trench and shell-hole was full of their dead, and for three nights they worked, dragging their wounded from No Man's Land, often in blankets for lack of stretchers. Seventy-nine officers and 1,777 men had been killed, 102 officers and 2,626 wounded; altogether there were some five thousand casualties. "They behaved gallantly," Tim Healy wrote, "and suffered heavy losses. So great was the wailing in Belfast," he added, unable to repress his habitual sneer, "that Carson for the moment lost popularity there."

On the 5th July, 1916, General Nugent wrote to Carson from Divisional Headquarters:

"The 1st July should for all time have a double meaning for Ulstermen.

"The attack carried out by the Ulster Division was the finest thing the new armies have done in this war. Observers from outside the Division who saw it say it was a superb example of discipline and courage.

"We had to come through a wood which was being literally blown to pieces, form up in successive lines outside of it under a devastating fire and then advance across the open for 400 yards to the first line of German trenches. It was done as if it was a parade movement on the barrack square.

"The losses were formidable before we ever reached the first line; but the men never faltered and finally rushed the first line, cheering and shouting 'Boyne' and 'No Surrender.'

"From there onwards they never checked nor wavered until they reached the 5th line of the German trenches which was the limit of the objective laid down for us. They captured and

brought in nearly 550 prisoners and actually captured many more who were either killed by the German fire before they reached our lines or were able to get away in the maze of trenches owing to the escort being knocked over.

"I can hardly bring myself to think or write of it. It was magnificent beyond description.

"Officers led their men with a gallantry to which I cannot do justice and the men followed them with equal gallantry and when the officers went down they went on alone.

"The Division was raked by machine-gun and shell fire from in front and from both flanks and our losses have been very severe.

"Ulster should be very proud of her sons."

The practical purpose of the General's letter was characteristic. There were two thousand of the more slightly wounded who would be able to return to the Front. "Unless a special point is made of it they will . . . be sent wherever drafts happen to be most wanted . . . They must come back to the Division; they would not be happy elsewhere, nor could the Division do without them. These are matters which can be arranged but which I can do nothing towards arranging myself. If you could help in the interests of the Division I should be most grateful."

Thus the Ulster Division was an absorbing interest to Carson at that time, not the men only but their families, anxious or bereaved, who wrote him from all parts of Ulster. Then his friend, Charles Craig, brother of James, was one of the missing—a prisoner, as was afterwards found. As for Lady Carson, with her friend Mrs. Spender she worked all day at the depot, where the work had become "so enormous that we can hardly cope with it." "I really can think of nothing," she notes in her Diary, "but that splendid Division and wish we could do more for them."



## CHAPTER XX

### *Leading the Opposition*

Fred Oliver – Political plans – Master of delay – Herbert Samuel – The soldier and the vote – Running for blood – Mesopotamia – Enemy influence – The Nigerian debate – Bonar Law shaken.

THE death of Lord Kitchener was bound to bring about changes in the Government, and incidentally brought several letters to Carson from his friend Fred Oliver. The purpose of the correspondent was to press upon Carson the merits of Lord Milner as a successor to Lord Kitchener at the War Office; but the interest of the letters for us lies in the light they throw upon the political situation. "He [Milner] with Lloyd George," Oliver wrote on the 9th June, 1916, "would form a hard core in the War Committee and Cabinet—attracting to them good but weaker men—and together they could either mend the administration—or—if *there were* no other way—end it by coming out together." After enlarging on the merits of Milner as an administrator and a man, Oliver went on to give a vivid and veracious account of the mind of the people and the state of the Government:

"Finally there is the mood of the country to be considered. It is awakened, sobered, alarmed, from one end to the other. Balfour was inspired by Providence when he issued his Admiralty statements about the Naval Battle, for which he has been so much abused. The naval losses—even with victory—have exercised a tremendous effect. . . . Kitchener's death has given a great shock to the nerves. . . . To the ordinary man in the street K. appeared to be the one strong silent character in a cage of chattering monkeys. When critics abused the Government the ordinary man-in-the-street said—'K. wouldn't stay on if it were really so bad as all that.' And that gave the Cabinet strength. Now he's gone, and they are devilish weak, though perhaps they haven't realised it as yet. . . . Public opinion doesn't

really believe that we won a great naval victory, though we did ! It believes that K. was a great administrative asset, though he wasn't ! It is alarmed by the German progress at Verdun and Ypres and fears that both may fall, which they may. . . . The country would welcome Milner's appointment as a strong man—no party hack—no politician—no axe of his own to grind—etc., etc. The country at the moment is all for standing shoulder to shoulder."

"*Second thoughts*," Oliver wrote the same day. "There is Lloyd George to be considered. It would be necessary to take him along with you. I've no reason to believe he would do otherwise than approve, but I don't know."

And Oliver wrote again (on the 12th June, 1916): "Of course my letter of Friday last was written on the assumption that the Government was going to hold together for some time. If it isn't—in plain words if the Government is coming out—there would clearly be no good putting in even the best man in the world: indeed in that case much better keep him clear of it.

"Nor would there be much good putting Milner in unless the Goat saw an advantage in having him there."

"The Goat," of course, was Oliver's pet name for Mr. Lloyd George.

The suggestion was made to Carson at that time that he should himself take a place in the Government. An urgent little note from Bonar Law on the 27th June, 1916, may or may not have had something to do with the proposal. "I must see you to-night if possible," Bonar Law wrote to Carson. "We have a Cabinet at 6.30 which will last till nearly eight. . . . Can I come and see you at your house with Austen if I can get him and Talbot ? . . ." There is less dubiety in Oliver's reference. Writing on the 29th June, he says:

"About the matter you made so light of last Monday, i.e. going in Government, I'm not so sure that it was quite right to turn it down so cavalierly: not if—as someone suggested—*you could take Milner in with you*. Then at least there would be other persons in the Cabinet—Lloyd George, Milner and you—who know that there is a war going on. This would be a nucleus, or spearhead, or whatever you might like to call it. Between you, you could surely put the dormouse [Asquith] in the teapot ?

"When I think of the two things—(1) the conduct of the war and (2) the making of peace—yea, and this third thing, (3) the situation which arises as soon as peace is made—I tremble when I think of missing any chance of having people capable of action put in positions where they will have a chance of acting.

"I submit that your objection to taking office under Asquith should not be insuperable if you are assured of two or three trusty and capable adherents.

"I have written to Milner in the above sense. I do think it is worth your while—for the country's sake: not for your own—to consider it."

Whatever they were, these advances came to nothing, and Carson maintained and increased his pressure on the Government in the House of Commons.

We have already seen how the Military Service Bill was withdrawn and replaced by another at his direction; a little later we see the same thing happening over a more intimate concern of the Government. Mr. Asquith, master of delay, had kept on postponing what he could not decide. Parliament was due to expire; he extended its life; the electoral register was old; he would not renew it. On 9th May, it was "engaging the attention of the Government"; by 22nd May he hoped to make the announcement in the course of the week; on 2nd June it was "under consideration" and would be announced "at an early date after the recess"; three weeks later the Prime Minister hoped to make a statement on the subject "very shortly." Then Carson put down a motion, and asked a series of searching questions, and the Government thought it prudent to refer the matter to a Committee.

That expedient was proposed (on the 19th July, 1916) by the Secretary of State for the Home Department in a speech imprudently jocular. Mr. Herbert Samuel asked if an armistice could be arranged to enable the British Army to vote; if the Germans should be invited to abstain from attack on election day—"the Ballot Act," he continued, "contains no provision to meet the contingency of a bombardment while the voters are at the poll." Would his right hon. and learned friend the Member for Dublin University offer a solution of these various difficulties?

"I will tell you what I think when you have finished," said

Carson with menace in his voice, and then when the Minister had brought his speech to an unregretted end—

“One finds,” said Carson, “some difficulty in characterising the performance to which we have just listened. After all, the encroachments that have been made upon the Constitution of this country since the war . . . are not to be treated as *opéra bouffe*. I doubt very much if any Minister at any other time would have dared to treat the House in the *comical* manner which we have just witnessed.”

There was a cry of, “It is an insult.”

“The worst part of this is,” Carson continued, “that the Government, if the views of the Home Secretary are accurate, have been humbugging the House for nearly a year.”

Here Carson raised the tone of the debate to another level: “I believe that the only broad line you can draw is this, that no possible sacrifice on behalf of anybody can be equal in any respect to the sacrifice of the man who is prepared, and whose duty it is, to go into battle . . . and risk his life for the preservation of his country. . . . I am prepared to move the Motion standing in my name. I believe in giving the franchise to the soldiers and the sailors who are fighting our battles.”

Then Carson turned to what he called the real purpose of the Government, by neglecting the register to have an excuse for continuing a worn-out Parliament. “What was this House elected for?” he asked scornfully. “It was elected to abolish the House of Lords . . . and curiously enough to abolish armaments. . . .”

There were unmistakable signs that the majority of the House was behind Carson, and the Prime Minister intervened to cover the retreat of the Home Secretary.

“I understand,” said Mr. Asquith ruefully, “that the general opinion of the House is averse to it; I therefore ask leave to withdraw the motion.”<sup>1</sup>

In the Fabian tactics of postponement Mr. Asquith had no equal, and we might trace this controversy, were it worth while, throughout the year. Having withdrawn his motion at Carson’s bidding, the Government prepared a Bill, and in September

<sup>1</sup> Parl. Deb., H. of C., vol. lxxxiv., cc. 1089 *et seq.* (18th July, 1916).

1916 we find Bonar Law anxiously inquiring whether Carson approved of it.

"I understand that on the whole," he wrote, on the 27th of that month, "you are prepared to support as the best course available about registration that the Government Bill, subject of course to amendments in detail, should be coupled with an arrangement to give soldiers at the front who would be qualified to vote under the Act, an opportunity of doing so.

"I propose to pass this proposal on to the Prime Minister; but before doing so I should like to feel sure that I have correctly remembered the substance of your conversation. I do not, of course, wish you to connect yourself just now if you would rather keep yourself free till the House meets; but I feel sure that if I could tell the P.M. that you are in favour of their plan it would be adopted."

Despite these amiable approaches there was no real accommodation, and Carson continued to press the claim of the manhood of the nation to a say in the issues of war and peace. "After an uncomfortable night [24th October]," says Mr. Spender, "in which Sir Edward Carson had been vehement on the soldiers' and sailors' theme, Lord Robert Cecil wrote to Asquith: 'I take the gravest view of the situation last night. It seemed to me that the House of Commons was entirely out of hand, and the Opposition not only bitter and relentless but running for blood. In my judgment unless some big stroke is made next week the Government will be in serious danger.'"<sup>1</sup>

So also we find Carson pressing for papers and inquiries in the matter of the Dardanelles and of Mesopotamia. In the end the inquiries are granted, and the papers, on military grounds, are refused. Here, as elsewhere, Carson gives voice to a formidable body of discontent in the House and in the country. "I have seen individuals," he says, "... who have really been almost tortured by the accounts they have received of the way matters have gone on in Mesopotamia ... we do want to avoid this ... that there should not be again an evacuation, and that all the toil and suffering should have been lost ... it is the duty of the Government to make up its mind ... as to whether they are really and genuinely going on with the operation, or whether

<sup>1</sup> *Life of Lord Oxford and Asquith*, vol. ii., p. 240.

the matter has been left, as it was in the case of the Dardanelles, to drift on, nothing being done."<sup>1</sup>

Carson was not only formidable in himself but he stood at the head of a formidable Opposition of men, of interests and of ideas. Mr. Asquith fought the war, as his biographer claims, without forgetting the adage—to behave as if your enemy might again be your friend. He was, besides, the head of a Free Trade Party under whose administration before the war the hostile and aggressive economic system of Germany had spread its roots and its branches under and over the British Empire. In certain great trades, as for example in iron and steel, in the base metals, in chemicals, in the electrical industry, in sugar, her domination had become so strong that the war left it unbroken. International capitalists, like Sir Edgar Speyer and Sir Ernest Cassel, who were thought to support these connections, remained influential in the counsels of the country. Speyer, whose sentiments if not whose activities were known to be at least invidious, was thought to have the ear of the Prime Minister.

The British manufacturer, the British producer, and those British merchants whose interests lay in the export trade, working to make an end of this economic servitude, brought their grievances and suspicions to Sir Edward Carson. That formidable portent from Australia, "Billy" Hughes, the Prime Minister of the Commonwealth, strengthened the case with evidence from the Antipodes. A Royal Commission, over which Lord Balfour of Burleigh presided, made out a strong case for a change of policy. The Government, in this as in other matters, hesitated and postponed and were thought to be half-hearted because divided in opinion. Under pressure of the Chamber of Commerce, they summoned an economic conference of the Allies in Paris; but the conclusions were in general terms, and "subject to the economic principles" of those engaged.

Mr. Asquith, indeed, made partial surrender to the growing movement of Mercantilist opinion in the House of Commons. "It does not matter," he said, "whether you have been a protected or a Free Trade country for this purpose; all of us have been too dependent on the chances and risks which we did not adequately foresee, and against which we certainly did not

<sup>1</sup> Parl. Deb., H. of C., vol. lxxxiv., cc. 1242-3 (20th July, 1916).

satisfactorily provide." But Carson pressed him to translate these general terms into definite policy. Nothing, he exclaimed, would so much encourage our people as our stern resolve that never again were the Germans to be allowed so to intertwine themselves in our economic relations as almost to clog the very wheel of operations at the commencement of the war.<sup>1</sup>

And Carson went on with this Mercantilist policy. He became Chairman of an "Enemy Influence Committee"; we find among his papers many files relating to enemy banks and businesses, and elaborate notes of the state of English law in regard to naturalisation. When he pressed for concerting measures with the Allies, Viscount Grey wrote to him urging prudential considerations: "After the murder of Captain Fryatt we consulted the French and Russian Governments as to whether any declaration could be made by the Allies in common. We have so far no reply to this from the French Government and a somewhat discouraging reply from Petrograd. . . . I am sure the interests of the country is the predominant motive for all your public action, and I hope that you will believe that I have no other motive in writing this letter to you." And next day (14th August, 1916) Grey sent on an "urgent plea from the Belgians asking us to hold our hands." "It must not be forgotten," said the Belgian Government, "that a considerable amount of property belonging to subjects of the Allies is at the mercy of our enemies, and that almost the whole of Belgium and several Departments of Northern France, to say nothing of other territories, are in their hands." It was natural in the Allies to be apprehensive. Again in November we find the Parliamentary Secretary to the Board of Trade writing to Carson deprecating publicity in measures to be taken against enemy firms: "The enemy," Mr. Pretyman wrote, "are hesitating very much in their policy of reprisals and do not really know what we are doing. We are keeping them in the dark as much as we can but the publication of this list will be of great use to them."

Carson allowed for these difficulties but maintained the general lines of his campaign, and the matter was brought to sharp crisis in a debate which not only shook but helped to end the Coalition.

<sup>1</sup> Parl. Deb., H. of C., vol. lxxxv., cc. 347 *et seq.* (2nd August, 1916).

It concerned what might seem an insignificant affair, the sale at auction of certain enemy properties in Nigeria. When the enemy owners were at last brought to liquidation, the Colonial Office proposed to allow neutrals to bid; Carson and his friends, having information that the neutral covered the enemy, moved that the sales be confined to British "natural-born subjects or companies wholly British." The debate, although it was opened by Mr. Leslie Scott and engaged many speakers, resolved itself into a duel between Carson and his old friend Bonar Law, Secretary of State for the Colonies. Carson took the issue out of its local bearings. It was a question of general policy. What was to be done with the fruits of the war, "scanty enough up to this?" Were they to go to the British who had paid the cost, or to strangers, or, through neutrals, back to Germany? British merchants paid the heavy cost of Income Tax and Excess Profits Tax; "but you intend to hand over these properties to those who will pay neither. . . . The money is to be held over and accumulated for the Germans until the end of the war. I hope we have not heard the last word on this matter."

They were dealing with the soil of the Empire which was their pride and glory to develop; let them lay down the broad principle once for all and let the country and the whole Empire know: "Are you fighting to hand your properties over to neutrals or are you fighting to hand them over to your own subjects?" And he touched upon a point very tender with the Government: "Do you know the state of tension in the country at the present moment as regards enemy influence, enemy properties, aye, and enemy interference in this country?"

The Government had pleaded that they could not trust the British merchants to be fair to the interests of the natives, if they were given a monopoly. If they could not trust these "condemned British merchants," let them put their own representatives on the company, let them have a Board of Control. "You can trust Jurgen, the Dutchman, with margarine factories throughout Germany"; but not the British merchant!

There is evidence that Mr. Bonar Law found it extremely embarrassing to reply to this attack. He also was a Mercantilist; he also had fought for the British against the German commerce; if his party were in revolt it was for the principles which



he had maintained before the war—and the revolt, moreover, was led by his old friend and colleague. He well knew the power of Carson; as we have seen, he had confessed to Redmond in March 1916 that if Carson so desired "he could drive the Government from office in no time"; and Lord Beaverbrook testifies that "one thing concerned Bonar Law greatly," his estrangement from Carson. Thus both in the cause and in the friend he opposed, Bonar Law found himself in a position of acute discomfort.

Bonar Law had to argue if not for a German, at least for a foreign interest. In his distress he sought refuge in a debating point. They wanted new capital and enterprise in Nigeria. Would they keep out a Frenchman? The debate gathered heat. "Absolutely untrue," Carson exclaimed at one moment. "Nonsense," he interrupted at another. "My right hon. friend is not very polite," Bonar Law retorted. "On many questions I admit I should bow to his opinion; but on this question I think I am as little likely as he to talk nonsense. . . . I am sorry, very sorry, to be so much at variance with my hon. friend opposite; but the conditions under which the Government is carried on produce strange results." They must all do as they thought right; but "I am sure he realises fully the seriousness of the course which he is taking, and is prepared to take the consequences if the division is successful."

This was a threat of dissolution, and carried the day, by 231 votes to 117; but the division gave little comfort to Mr. Bonar Law, since the Government had been saved chiefly by Liberal, Labour, Socialist and Irish votes. Too many for his comfort of the unofficial Conservatives of the Party he was supposed to lead had voted with Carson. His friend Max Aitken afterwards described the effect both upon Bonar Law's always despondent nature and upon his position in the Government. Before the debate he was concerned at the breach with Carson and at the prospect of defeat: after the division "I found Bonar Law in his room surrounded by supporters who were congratulating him as on a triumph and quite unaware of the real significance. . . . It was clear that such attacks could not be continued for long without a defeat in the Lobby ensuing, and that apart from this, continuance must render Bonar Law's claim to the

confidence of the Conservative Party nugatory, and his position in the Government consequently impossible." Max Aitken urged Bonar Law to resign: better that than to be forced out of office by the action of his own rebellious followers.<sup>1</sup>

There was another alarming circumstance of this Nigerian debate; Mr. Lloyd George took no part in the division, and although he always denied it and protested that he had paired, it was suspected even by his colleagues that he had absented himself of set purpose. It was even rumoured that when Mr. Geoffrey Howard, the Liberal Whip, had rung up his house to remind him of the urgency of the division, Mrs. Lloyd George had replied that her husband was dining with Carson. Lord Beaverbrook, who tells the story, denies its accuracy. Mr. Lloyd George, he says, was dining that night at the house of Lord Lee of Fareham, to meet both Carson and Lord Milner. "All three had met that evening to discuss the general situation and the possibilities of co-operation, and it is claimed the question of the Nigerian debate never came up at all."<sup>2</sup>

It remains true that the attitude of Mr. Lloyd George at that time was equivocal and portentous.

<sup>1</sup> Lord Beaverbrook, *Politicians and the War*, vol. ii., pp. 85 *et seq.*

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 99.

## CHAPTER XXI

### *The Cabal*

Negotiated peace - "Smash the Government" - Lloyd George - Mr. Asquith - Forebodings - Max Aitken - Sir William Robertson - The scheme - Asquith rejects it - Asquith and Carson.

THINGS were going from bad to worse with the Coalition, which could no longer command the House of Commons and was harassed with doubts and hesitations in the Cabinet. In this despondent mood it even discussed the ominous question of a negotiated peace. The Prime Minister asked the members of the War Committee to express their views as to the terms upon which peace might be concluded, and Lord Lansdowne stated the case in a memorandum which if it refused to admit defeat, discovered but little hope of victory. "Possibly," Lord Crewe afterwards wrote, "the veritable *causa causans* of the final break-up is to be traced to Lord Lansdowne's striking paper of November 18, 1916."<sup>1</sup>

It is fair to say that Lord Robert Cecil had put with equal force the other point of view, and that after considering these and other secret papers Mr. Asquith decided—and the Cabinet agreed—that it was no time to discuss peace with the German armies undefeated and in possession. Lord Crewe nevertheless suggested that Mr. Lloyd George "regarded this document as the danger-signal, marking an obstruction on the road."

It is certain that rumours of these Cabinet matters got about and greatly exasperated feeling against the Government both in the Army and in the Opposition. Thus Sir Henry Wilson notes in his Diary that on the 25th November, 1916, Mr. H. A. Gwynne "rang him up to say that certain members of the Cabinet were considering the question of an Armistice," whereupon Wilson "urged Gwynne to push along and turn this Government out,"

<sup>1</sup> See memorandum by the Marquis of Crewe on the "Break-up of the First Coalition," printed in *Memoirs and Reflections*, by the Earl of Oxford and Asquith, vol. II., p. 128.

and Mr. Gwynne, on his part, promised to "address Carson's Committee next week and give him the figures I gave him, and thus force . . . Bonar Law and Co. to leave the Cabinet."

The soldiers, at that time, it may be explained, were by no means so despondent as the statesmen. Sir Douglas Haig at the front and Sir William Robertson at Whitehall were equally confident of ultimate victory if only the Government and the nation would support them. When the Cabinet asked the C.I.G.S. for a minute on the subject, that stout old soldier wrote that only "cowards, cranks and philosophers" could doubt the final result, provided we did what we ought to do and could do, and did it in time.

Next day Sir Henry Wilson lunched with Mr. Lloyd George, and told him that "the present Government stank in the nostrils of the whole Army, and that if he was to break away and raise the standard of victory, he would have the whole Army behind him." No doubt also Wilson communicated his news and his fury to Carson, for that same night (26th November) he "dined with Fred Oliver, also there, Milner, Carson, Geoffrey Robinson, and Waldorf Astor. . . . Carson asked what he should advise Lloyd George and Bonar Law to do, as a crisis was coming. Our unanimous advice was that we should get Lloyd George to smash the Government and get Bonar Law to come out, so that Lloyd George should get the Unionist machinery for a general election should one come about . . . and that a real fighting Government should be formed round Lloyd George, Carson and Milner."<sup>1</sup>

Mr. Lloyd George had seen for some time not merely the unsuccess but the unpopularity of the Coalition. He had offered his resignation after every defeat, and his friends had contrived to convey the impression that there was a difference in spirit between him and his colleagues, and that although he was a member of the Government he deplored its mistakes. "One course I have thought of," he said to Lord Riddell, "would be to resign my seat in the Cabinet and continue my work at the Munitions Department. I should thus escape this horrible responsibility for things I cannot alter."<sup>2</sup> As early as October 1915, he was "sick to death of the eternal talk and policy of

<sup>1</sup> Field Marshal Sir Henry Wilson, *Life and Diaries* (Callwell), vol. i., pp. 298-9.

<sup>2</sup> *War Diary*, for October 23rd, 1915, p. 128.

drift," and was saying, "The P.M. is a great man, but his methods are not suited to war." If he had not gone with Carson he had thought of going. "I am not sure," he said to Riddell in December 1915, "that I should not have resigned with Carson."

Although Mr. Lloyd George thus reluctantly remained in office, he watched Sir Edward Carson in Opposition with the deepest interest. Thus in January 1916, he said to the journalist that "Carson has the finest opportunity of any politician in the country," and again in April: "Carson is improving daily. He is managing his little front with great skill. He is a fine fellow." In June when Mr. Lloyd George was offered the War Office he consulted Carson, and afterwards told Riddell that "he [Carson] would be glad in one way if I came out. He would like to work with me, and that together we might bring the Government down and replace it by a sounder and more energetic body. He, however, thought I could render more useful service by going to the War Office, but that I must stipulate for full powers." There was, then, if these reports are accurate, an approach to an understanding between the Secretary of State and the leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Lloyd George dallied with these ideas all through the summer and autumn of 1916. On the 30th July we find some approach to a plan of campaign. Thus Lloyd George, at dinner, to Riddell:

"He asked my opinion of the result of a General Election, in which the issue would be the more vigorous prosecution of the war; the new party to be headed by Carson whom he described in eulogistic language. A man of resolution, good judgment and inspiring personality.

"R.: What line would you take in such a conflict?

"L. G.: I don't know, but I feel we cannot go on as we are going.

"R.: A clear-cut issue would be necessary. The question is a personal one. Who is to carry on the war?

"L. G.: The Carson candidates would be prepared to support Bonar Law, Austen Chamberlain and myself.

"R.: Would you be willing to serve under Carson? You should be the alternative to Asquith.

"L. G.: I should be glad and proud to serve under him. My only purpose is to get on with the war."<sup>1</sup>

Thus, long before the Lansdowne memorandum, thoughts of an alternative Government, of a new combination between Carson and Lloyd George, were already forming in that busy political mind. There was at least one other Minister who was aware of the developing situation, the Secretary of State for the Colonies. When the death of Lord Kitchener left the War Office vacant, Mr. Bonar Law went to Mr. Asquith. "You must," he advised him, "appoint L. G. He wants the job and you will have to give it to him. You had better do it with a good grace. . . . If you stand in his way he will probably crush you."<sup>2</sup> Nor was the keen eye of an anxious wife deceived. Mrs. Asquith wrote in her Diary on the day Mr. Lloyd George was appointed Secretary of State for War: "We are out, it is only a question of time when we shall have to leave Downing Street."<sup>3</sup>

On the subject of the Prime Minister, Sir Edward Carson and Mr. Bonar Law were, as we have seen, in disagreement. The latter thought him indispensable to the Government, the former took him to be the chief cause of its infirmities. Not that Carson had any sort of grudge against Mr. Asquith; on the contrary, if partiality counted, there was a personal liking and the comradeship of the Bar. Thus upon the death of Raymond Asquith (in battle in September 1916) it was natural for Carson to express "on my own behalf the feeling, which I am sure the whole House will re-echo, of deep sympathy and affection towards the Prime Minister, who, in the time of his sorrow, is carrying the whole burden of the sorrow of his country."

And Carson said to Lord Riddell about that time "that Mr. A. presided with great dignity at the Cabinet, and that he regarded him with feelings of friendship and affection."<sup>4</sup>

On the other hand Carson felt strongly—he had left the Coalition in this fixed belief—that Mr. Asquith's temporising habit was fatal to the conduct of the war. His own strong and positive mind set a high value on decision. When briefed with other Counsel he would have long consultations and hear all

<sup>1</sup> *War Diary*, pp. 205-6.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 235.

<sup>3</sup> *The Autobiography of Margot Asquith*, II., p. 245.

<sup>4</sup> *War Diary*, p. 244 (for March 10th, 1917).

opinions; but, before going into court, Carson decided upon some definite course of procedure. "Vacillation and uncertainty," in his opinion, "were always fatal." So he said to Lord Riddell of Asquith: "Mr. A. had been a failure during the war, as he had endeavoured to conduct public affairs in the same way as he had done during times of peace. Compromise and finesse were all very well in peace-time but fatal during a war."

Carson, then, who owed no allegiance to Asquith, and who was accustomed to act upon his judgment without fear or favour, was working openly to change the administration, in which cause he found growing support both in Parliament and the Press. He had his Unionist War Committee behind him; Lord Milner, who inspired *The Times*, and Mr. Gwynne, who edited the *Morning Post*, cordially agreed with him. Lord Northcliffe, who was neither his ally nor his friend, for his own reasons worked in the same direction. They all believed that under Mr. Asquith the war could not be won.

Was the Prime Minister maligned or did he deserve this censure? Mr. Lloyd George may be called an interested witness; but his opinion is worth quoting. "Asquith's will," he says in his *War Memoirs*, "became visibly flabbier, tardier and more flaccid under the strain of war."<sup>1</sup> There were many at the time, and more in retrospection, who preferred King Log to King Stork; but there is one piece of testimony which will have its weight with the judicious reader. Lord Curzon, writing to Lord Lansdowne on the 3rd December, 1916, said, "Had one felt that reconstitution by and under the present Prime Minister was possible, we should all have preferred to try it. But we know that with him as Chairman, either of the Cabinet or the War Committee, it is absolutely impossible to win the war."<sup>2</sup> If this was the opinion of those of his Conservative colleagues who preferred Mr. Asquith to Mr. Lloyd George, it could hardly have been without foundation.

We have seen how the attack of his old friend Carson in the Nigerian debate shook Bonar Law, and there was another friend, closer and more assiduous, who worked to convert this shock into explosive energy. "I doubt," says Mr. Lloyd George

<sup>1</sup> Vol. ii., p. 1009.

<sup>2</sup> *Life of Lord Lansdowne* (Newton), pp. 452-3.

in his *War Memoirs*, "whether Mr. Bonar Law would have taken the final step of threatened disruption had it not been for his fear of the lash of Carson's terrible tongue. Lord Beaverbrook knew this well, and made full use of it to persuade his friend to rise to the greatest opportunity of his career." Like a busy shuttle, Sir Max Aitken went between Lloyd George and Bonar Law, persuading either that the other was his natural ally. Max found his friend, as he describes it, "sticky." "The root cause of the trouble," Lord Beaverbrook afterwards wrote, "was that Bonar Law had formed the opinion that in matters of office and power Lloyd George was a self-seeker and a man who considered no interest except his own." It was difficult to shake the possibly unreasonable prejudice that "Lloyd George's plans boiled down to one simple proposal—to put Asquith out and to put himself in."

There was another factor which had its influence in the negotiations. Sir William Robertson, at that time C.I.G.S., jealously guarded the right of the General Staff to conduct military affairs without political interference. The new Secretary of State solicitously endeavoured to persuade his military colleague to go to Russia: but the gruff old soldier replied that "he did not want to run the risk of meeting the same fate as Kitchener," and "did not see what good he could do if he were in Russia." When Mr. Balfour and Mr. Asquith obligingly added their influence, Sir William Robertson "did not argue with them, but simply reiterated his 'No.'" It was therefore not altogether unreasonable in Bonar Law to suspect that "Lloyd George's plan of a new executive War Council was . . . a scheme for side-stepping Sir William Robertson's authority."<sup>1</sup>

These suspicions in the mind of Mr. Bonar Law were broken down in a series of conversations which occupied the latter part of November, and are recorded by Lord Beaverbrook. Thus there was a meeting between Carson, Bonar Law and Lloyd George on the 20th, a meeting between Bonar Law and Carson on the 21st and a meeting between Bonar Law, Lloyd George and Carson on the 25th. In these conversations "Bonar Law got the impression that Carson was not really working intimately

<sup>1</sup> The whole story is graphically set forth in Lord Beaverbrook's *Politicians and the War*, pp. 85 et seq.



with Lloyd George," and Aitken formed the opinion that Carson "shared some of Bonar Law's doubts about Lloyd George." And they were both right. Despairing of the Prime Minister, Carson had turned to the Secretary of State for War as the only practicable alternative; if doubts assailed him he thrust them aside, and went straight forward, after his custom, upon a mind made up.

Experience teaches the historian to be a little wary of the testimony of Mr. Lloyd George, yet as he was one of the three chiefly concerned in this affair his evidence must be cited. "Sir Edward Carson," he says in his *War Memoirs*, "was for pushing Mr. Asquith out of the Premiership. He argued that any shifts like a War Committee, whatever its composition, must necessarily fail so long as the chief responsible authority was vested in Mr. Asquith. Certain Ministers whom he named would be constantly at his ear and poisoning him against the new Committee, and postponing, modifying and thwarting its decisions. Mr. Bonar Law was emphatically of the opinion that it was desirable for the sake of preserving the national unity that Mr. Asquith should retain his position as Prime Minister. He dreaded anything like a split in the Cabinet at such a juncture. . . . I was also in favour of retaining Mr. Asquith as Prime Minister provided he left the new Committee full and unfettered powers to direct the war. It is rather significant that at this stage not one of us (except Sir Edward Carson) contemplated Mr. Asquith's retirement, and consequently there was nothing said at any of our interviews as to his possible successor."<sup>1</sup>

It might also be said that, of the three, only Carson had no ties to consider of loyalty to a colleague and to a chief.

At a meeting on the 25th this little cabal prepared a scheme which that night Mr. Bonar Law laid before the Prime Minister. It was for a War Council with Mr. Asquith as president, Mr. Lloyd George as chairman, and Mr. Bonar Law and Sir Edward Carson as members, which should take the place of the larger War Committee of the Cabinet and devote itself wholly and continuously to the conduct of the war. Mr. Asquith, in a letter to Bonar Law written next day, rejected the proposal. He admitted that there was "too much talk and consequent waste

<sup>1</sup> *War Memoirs*, vol. ii., p. 981.

of time at the War Committee"; but it had nevertheless done valuable work, and he did not see how any body of the kind would work unless the heads of the War Office and the Admiralty were members of it.

"As regards Carson," Mr. Asquith continued, "for whom, as you know, I have the greatest personal regard, I do not see how it would be possible, in order to secure his services, to pass over Balfour, or Curzon, or McKenna, all of whom have the advantage of intimate knowledge of the secret history of the last twelve months. That he should be admitted over their heads at this stage to the inner circle of the Government is a step which, I believe, would be deeply resented, not only by them and my political friends, but by almost all your Unionist colleagues. It would be universally believed to be the price paid for shutting the mouth of our most formidable Parliamentary critic—a manifest sign of weakness and cowardice. As to Lloyd George, you know as well as I do both his qualities and his defects. He has many qualities that would fit him for the first place, but he lacks the one thing needful—he does not inspire trust. . . . Here again, there is one construction, and one only, that could be put on the new arrangement—that it has been engineered by him with the purpose, not perhaps at the moment, but as soon as a fitting pretext could be found, of his displacing me.

"In short, the plan could not, in my opinion, be carried out without fatally impairing the confidence of loyal and valued colleagues, and undermining my own authority."

Thus the approach of Bonar Law had failed, and it became the turn of Lloyd George to try a fall with Mr. Asquith. On Friday, the 1st December, 1916, he addressed a memorandum to the Prime Minister proposing a War Committee of three with "full powers, subject to the supreme control of the Prime Minister, to direct all questions connected with the war." The Prime Minister replied the same day with counter-proposals—that the War Committee be reconstructed on lines more concentrated and more efficient; but that "the Prime Minister must be its Chairman" and that a Committee of National Organisation be formed "to deal with the purely domestic side of war problems." He would not part with his power,

which lay in the Cabinet: "The Cabinet," he concluded, "would in all cases have ultimate authority." Mr. Asquith then replied, in effect, to the proposal of one War Council with a proposal of two, and here he put himself in line with the Unionist members of his Government, except Mr. Bonar Law.

Mr. Bonar Law, indeed, had met his Unionist colleagues the day before and had opened out to them the plan of a War Council with Mr. Lloyd George as chairman. They had seen in it only a plan for making a dictator of the Secretary of State for War, whom they neither liked nor trusted and they had retorted upon Mr. Bonar Law with this alternative of two Committees.

Thus Mr. Asquith was getting his forces into line. Within the Government, with his Liberal colleagues, except Mr. Lloyd George, and his Conservative colleagues, except Mr. Bonar Law (as he thought) behind him, he must have felt himself the stronger. But his letter was nevertheless pacific and conciliatory; it offered terms. Mr. Asquith had no desire for another crisis within his Government—or without.

Without—there, for Mr. Asquith, lay the menace. He might be sure of the majority of his Cabinet; but he could no longer be sure of the majority of Parliament or of the country. Lloyd George, like Glendower, could raise Wales behind him; Lord Derby, who might be expected to go with Lloyd George, commanded Lancashire; Bonar Law as Conservative Leader was in control of the party machine, and behind them stood Carson, with his Unionist War Committee, his formidable appeal to Nationalism, to Mercantilism, to the fighting instincts of the nation. Carson was the decisive force in that crisis. With Lloyd George Mr. Asquith could deal if he could isolate him from Bonar Law; but Bonar Law, as Asquith must have suspected, was under the sway of Carson. And Carson's mind was made up. "His instinct," says Lord Beaverbrook shrewdly, "had penetrated to the belief that we were faced by a menace which might be described as respectable defeatism. Carson's judgment was determined and his position unassailable. He was convinced beyond argument. He was a strong reserve in a great emergency."

Could Mr. Asquith hope to shake Carson in his purpose?

It must have seemed to the Prime Minister in that critical week-end well worth his while to try. "I drove down to Walmer yesterday [Saturday] afternoon," Asquith wrote, "hoping to find sunshine and peace." Walmer Castle stands by Deal and Deal is within easy reach of Birchington.

## CHAPTER XXII

### *The Fall of Asquith*

Two telephone calls - Crisis with a big C - Little red boxes - In the friendliest spirit - Breakfast conversation - Carson to Bonar Law - The ruin of Asquith - The Conservative Ministers - Meeting at the Palace - Carson chooses - The Admiralty - The War Council.

ON the day that Mr. Lloyd George received this polite rebuff from the Prime Minister, Carson lingered in Town expecting news which did not come. "I went down to Birchington by early train," Lady Carson notes in her Diary under the date of Friday, December 1st, 1916. "Edward came in the evening with Charles Gill, as Lloyd George asked him to stay, but he never heard a word from him all day. Edward and Lloyd George are decided something must be done. Asquith is wobbling all over the shop more than ever." Carson was never happier than at Birchington, with his wife and Charles Gill, one of his oldest and dearest of friends, for companions; but that week-end was destined to be broken and brief.

Lloyd George at that time must have felt himself in an almost desperate situation. Late on the Friday night he had met Bonar Law at Max Aitken's rooms in the Hyde Park Hotel, but had found him undecided. Bonar Law, indeed, was still endeavouring to make up his mind, if one may judge by his letter to Lansdowne on the Friday: "I recommended both Asquith and George to have it out with each other, and I consider, therefore, that for the moment the matter is out of my hands." His Unionist colleagues had been pressing him to give up Lloyd George, and his interest and inclination were alike uncertain. The mind of Bonar Law had to be turned to the sticking-point, or the game was lost, and Lloyd George may well have thought that only Carson could do it.

Thus it came about that on Saturday, the 2nd December, 1916, the telephone bell at the Birchington bungalow rang twice. The first call was from the Secretary of State for War. "Lloyd

George telephoned for Edward," Lady Carson wrote in her Diary, "as he felt deserted. So he went up." The second call was from Mrs. Asquith. They were at Walmer, Mr. Asquith being Warden of the Cinque Ports. Curzon, writing to Lansdowne, said that Asquith had "slipped away" to Walmer, "with characteristic nonchalance"; but as Walmer was at Deal and Deal within easy reach of Birchington, Lady Carson may have been nearer the truth when she noted in her Diary: "Asquith has gone away to Walmer thinking he will see Edward."

Whatever the impulse, it came too late. When Mrs. Asquith asked for Sir Edward, Lady Carson replied that he had gone to London. "London!" Mrs. Asquith exclaimed, "why has he gone to London?" and without waiting for a reply hung up the receiver. Soon after 11 o'clock on Sunday morning Mr. Asquith was on his way back to Town.

That Mr. Asquith hoped to see Carson that week-end is merely a surmise which rests on a telephone call; what is certain is that they were both brought to London by the same cause. "I was forced back by Bongie and Montagu and Rufus," Asquith wrote, "to grapple with a 'Crisis'—this time with a very big C." Edwin Montagu, who stood very close to Asquith, had, indeed, summoned the Prime Minister to Town with an alarming letter. He reported a situation "probably irretrievably serious." He had spent "an hour of hard fighting with Lloyd George," and feared he had committed himself, "though there is always a chance. . . ."

Lloyd George seemed to be determined on having his small War Council without the Prime Minister; otherwise he and Derby would go, and it would then be impossible for Bonar Law to remain. There would be a frightful crisis; and Lloyd George and his friends would be able to say that they had broken up the Government "because they saw no prospect of improvement."

This piece of frightfulness was obviously intended to put the Prime Minister in a mood to accept terms, and, as we shall see, it had its effect. Sunday was a troublous day not only for Mr. Asquith but for Mr. Lloyd George also, everything being then in the balance. "Edward," Lady Carson noted in her Diary that night, "went off to breakfast with Lord Derby: Ll. G. there too. Lord Derby and Ll. G. will resign if Asquith doesn't agree to small War Council. A. is rushing back to London. Mr. Gwynne,

Mr. Blumenfeld, Mr. Robinson, all came in with different tales, the only really true one—all the Unionists in the Cabinet resigned, then wanted their little red boxes and withdrew. Bonar Law can't make up his mind, but is slowly realising he wants to pull himself out of his mess by Edward . . . the Unionists in the Cabinet want Edward kept out of the Cabinet at all costs."

This vignette does not quite adequately describe the activities of the Conservative part of the Cabinet. Lord Lansdowne had gone down to Bowood; Mr. Balfour was ill in bed, and the rest were put in ill humour by certain inspired articles in the Press. They resented the beating-up of the Conservative Party by Carson; they suspected Bonar Law of an intrigue of which they had been imperfectly informed; they had no desire to exchange an easy rule for a restless dictatorship. Yet they foresaw that if Mr. Asquith dismissed Mr. Lloyd George, the latter and his allies would lead a victorious movement in the House and in the country; they therefore urged the Prime Minister to tender the resignation of the Government, calculating that Mr. Lloyd George would be asked to form an alternative Government and that he would either fail or be forced to make terms with Mr. Asquith and themselves.

This resolution they put in the hands of Mr. Bonar Law, who went alone to the Prime Minister, and, without showing him the resolution, told him the general effect: "His [Mr. Bonar Law's] message," says Lord Crewe, "was curtly delivered, but in further conversation it was implied that the demand of resignation was not made in Mr. Lloyd George's interest but that the Government might be reconstructed."

That Mr. Asquith understood this somewhat subtle intention is not quite clear. It would rather appear that he thought himself deserted by his Conservative colleagues; and was therefore in a mood to come to terms. "Mr. Asquith and I," says Mr. Lloyd George of that Sunday afternoon, "discussed the whole situation in the friendliest spirit and ultimately came to a complete understanding."<sup>1</sup> As to the friendliness, there might be two opinions.<sup>2</sup> Mr. Lloyd George, himself, quotes the hard saying—

<sup>1</sup> *War Memoirs*, vol. ii., p. 987.

<sup>2</sup> "Asquith was very bitter. Evidently he conceals his feelings from L. G."  
—*Lord Riddell's War Diary* for 6th December, 1916, p. 223.

"There is no friendship at the top," and we may here remember also John Dryden's warning—"The politician neither loves nor hates." Nor was the understanding complete, for the question of personnel had still to be considered; but on the main question of a smaller War Committee with greater powers there seems to have been agreement. Mr. Asquith stipulated that he was to have "supreme and effective control of war policy"; that the chairman was to report to him daily; that its conclusions were to be subject to his approval or veto, and that he could at his own discretion attend its meetings.

Carson used afterwards to say that Mr. Asquith by these terms had got all he required; that if the Prime Minister cared to attend and preside over every sitting no one could have prevented him and that he made a mistake in going back upon this settlement. "But Asquith," so Carson summarised the change of mind, "mentioned it to McKenna, who said, 'Have nothing to do with it; you are indispensable'—and this proved the ruin of Asquith."

Be the friendliness what it might be, written evidence was thought to be desirable. Mr. Edwin Montagu, who "kept a leg in each camp," tried hard that Sunday night to persuade Mr. Asquith to put the agreement in writing and send it to Mr. Lloyd George. There, however, he failed. The Prime Minister would go no further than to make an official statement, which was issued at 11.45 p.m., that he had advised the King to consent to a reconstruction of the Government. This, however, was thought to convey that Mr. Lloyd George had won his point. For when Sir Edward Carson met Lord Derby and Mr. Lloyd George again at breakfast on the Monday morning, there were proposals for the new Administration. "Lloyd George," Lady Carson noted in her Diary, "suggests Admiralty with a good second, as he has in Lord Derby; and, of course, only Lloyd George, Edward and Bonar Law on the War Council."

Thus at breakfast on the Monday morning; but already the situation was losing its brief aspect of certainty. When they saw the notice of reconstruction in their morning papers, Mr. Asquith's Liberal colleagues came crowding in upon him to express their surprise and dismay. Point was given to their protests by an article in *The Times*, telling the story of the crisis and insulting the Prime Minister on his defeat. Various Conservative Ministers



besides dropped in to throw a new light upon the motive of their resignation. Thus incensed and fortified the Prime Minister refused to see the Secretary of State for War or to give him any satisfaction through that sedulous go-between, Mr. Edwin Montagu. All that day the Man of Destiny was kept dangling while the Prime Minister, behind closed doors, debated the possibilities of getting on without him. For this, as far as the Cabinet went, he had the assurance of all his Liberal colleagues, and all his Conservative Ministers except Mr. Bonar Law, Lord Derby and Mr. Balfour. For the support of the last-named he had reason to hope, if for no other reason, because Mr. Lloyd George had recently expressed a strong opinion about Mr. Balfour's work at the Board of Admiralty. Nevertheless, as the First Lord had been in bed throughout the crisis, his position, which was to be decisive, remained unknown.

As for Bonar Law, if he still hesitated, he was being screwed to the sticking-point. To that end Carson wrote on the Monday night:

*" Confidential.*

5, Eaton Place, S.W.

*" December 4th, 16.*

" MY DEAR BONAR LAW,—I am convinced after our talk this evening that no patchwork is possible. It would be unreal and couldn't last—a system founded on mistrust and jealousy and dislike is doomed to failure and in a crisis like the present it would really be disastrous on this account to the country. The only solution I can see is for the P.M. to resign and for L. G. to form a Government—a very small one. If the House won't support it he should go to the country and we would know where we are. I quite admit that the want of patriotism of many Liberals may raise a good deal of opposition but it will either be overcome or it will lead to peace, and in this latter case we will not be worse off than in the gulf to which we are now heading. If the country is sound everything will come right. If not (and I think every day under the present régime is producing pacifists) we will save further sacrifice.

" I am breakfasting with Derby and L. G. to-morrow and will state my view.

" Yours sincerely,

" EDWARD CARSON."

By Monday night, nevertheless, Mr. Asquith felt himself strong enough to reject the proposals of the Secretary of State for War. That night he wrote to Mr. Lloyd George a cold and disinheriting letter. He had been authorised by the King to accept the resignation of his colleagues and form a new Government. He started therefore with a clean slate. As for the new War Committee, the Prime Minister must be chairman and must also decide on the capacity of the men who were to sit on it for the work they had to do. Mr. Balfour was necessary to the Board of Admiralty:

"I must add that Sir Edward Carson (for whom personally, and in every other way, I have the greatest regard) is not from the only point of view which is significant to me (namely the most effective prosecution of the war), the man qualified among my colleagues, present and past, to be a Member of the War Committee."

This decision, as Carson has said, was the ruin of Mr. Asquith. On Tuesday morning "Edward went again," Lady Carson noted in her Diary, "to breakfast with Lord Derby. B. L. and Ll. G. were there. B. L. is strong for Edward now!" The combination assured to Lloyd George power equal to his purpose. Later in the morning he wrote the Prime Minister. First he recapitulated the history of the crisis. "I have more than once," he proceeded, "asked to be released from my responsibility for a policy with which I was in thorough disagreement. . . . We have thrown away opportunity after opportunity and I am convinced, after deep and anxious reflection, that it is my duty to leave the Government in order to inform the people of the real condition of affairs, and to give them an opportunity, before it is too late, to save their native land from a disaster which is inevitable if the present methods are longer persisted in. As all delay is fatal in war, I place my office without further parley at your disposal."

The Prime Minister did not accept the challenge; but tendered his own resignation that same day, and that night the King sent for Bonar Law. "He will have to say he cannot form a Government and then L. G. must," Lady Carson noted in her Diary (on Tuesday, 5th December, 1916). "Ll. G. came here at 10 (p.m.). I just waited to wish him luck. . . . He said, 'He and I are going to see this through,' meaning Edward. B. L. is there now

and Addison, and they are making a Cabinet in Edward's room, and I am waiting impatiently. I am sure that E. and L. G. can manage it and all will be well."

So it might seem to Lady Carson; but the situation was still cloudily uncertain. That day (Tuesday) those Conservative Ministers who adhered to Mr. Asquith—chiefly Lord Curzon, Lord Robert Cecil and Austen Chamberlain—sent Walter Long to the Colonial Office to summon Bonar Law to the India Office where they proposed to call him to account. But their leader, showing a higher spirit than was usual with him, indignantly refused their summons and himself called a meeting at the Colonial Office, the upshot of which was that these Conservative Ministers again sent their resignations to Mr. Asquith. And Lord Curzon, it appears, went so far as to give the Prime Minister the fatal assurance that he and his Conservative colleagues would refuse to serve in any alternative Administration, either under Mr. Lloyd George or under Mr. Bonar Law.

On Wednesday, the 6th December, Sir Edward Carson, Mr. Lloyd George and Mr. Bonar Law held their morning meeting at Pembroke Lodge. The Conservatives being divided they saw the importance of Mr. Balfour, whose influence was strong enough to swing the uncertain either way. Bonar Law and Lloyd George went therefore together to see him; but the First Lord would give no decision pending a conference at Buckingham Palace, which he hoped might clear up uncertainties.

Thus it came about that on Wednesday there was a meeting at the Palace of Mr. Asquith, Mr. Bonar Law, Mr. Balfour, Mr. Lloyd George and Mr. Henderson, at which Mr. Balfour and Mr. Bonar Law diffidently disputed the first place in the Government. Either would willingly have passed it to the other; but neither would take it unless Mr. Asquith would accept a place in the Administration.

Mr. Asquith refused on the ground that one who had been so long a Prime Minister could not be expected to serve as a subordinate. Mr. Lloyd George says that Mr. Asquith was bitter; Lord Beaverbrook reports (no doubt on the authority of Bonar Law) that his manner was "like that of a schoolboy who has got an unexpected half-holiday," and conjectures that Mr. Asquith was still under the illusion that no Government

could be formed without him. There is some support for this explanation of the mind of the Prime Minister in the *Westminster Gazette* of the Wednesday night. "In the event," said that newspaper, "of Mr. Lloyd George refusing or being unable to form a Government, it seems probable that Mr. Asquith will again be sent for." Mr. J. A. Spender, editor of the *Westminster Gazette*, was a close friend of the Prime Minister. When Mr. Bonar Law pressed Mr. Asquith on the subject, he replied by letter that ten of his late Liberal colleagues were "unanimously of opinion that I ought not to join your Government."

Partly doubt and partly bashfulness kept up the uncertainty. "Bonar Law," Lady Carson notes (on Wednesday, Dec. 6th), "told the King he couldn't form a Government so Lloyd George is to do it, so it may fall back on B. L. after all. Edward has been seeing people all day. . . . Edward has gone to see L. G. at War Office." At this point, then, there remained these two—Bonar Law and Lloyd George, either ready, as both professed, to support the other. They referred their dilemma to Carson who stood, like Warwick the King Maker, behind them.

Carson, weighing their respective claims, might have preferred Bonar Law as more likely to follow a Conservative policy; but he had to consider the composition of the House of Commons, and thought that Lloyd George could better command Radical and Labour support. He therefore decided for Lloyd George.

This decision made, Bonar Law was sent to Balfour, whom he found sitting in his bedroom in a dressing-gown, and offered him the Foreign Office. "Well, you hold a pistol to my head—I must accept," said Balfour, and thereby any doubt of Conservative support was removed. In the event, as Mr. J. A. Spender dryly remarks, there were not enough pistols to go round. Mr. Asquith discovered too late the value of those pledges which, he had supposed, made him indispensable. Only his Liberal colleagues of the Cabinet remained true to him in his fall. The Conservative members of his Government, including Lord Curzon, who had given him the pledge, trooped into the Administration, not, we may be sure, because they "wanted their little red boxes," but because they thought themselves indispensable to the service of their country. Their adhesion, however, came on the Thursday.

In the meantime Lloyd George's "affable familiar ghost," Dr. Addison, was busy in the Liberal Party—and could assure his friend, by Wednesday evening, of 126 Liberal M.P.s definitely promised and more coming in.

Dr. Addison burst into the War Office with this news after the main question had been decided between Lloyd George, Bonar Law and Carson, and while the various offices were being allocated. One of the Whips was in the act of reading the list to be filled in, and had come to the name of the Munitions Department. "I want that," said Dr. Addison—and got it.

Bonar Law had gone to the Palace to inform the King that he felt himself unequal to the charge of forming a Ministry. Carson and Lloyd George were standing together at the window, looking out upon the vast expectant throng which filled Whitehall, when the summons came to Mr. Lloyd George to go to the Palace.

"Go," said Carson grimly, "and take what is coming to you," and as Lloyd George passed out into Whitehall he was almost overwhelmed by the cheers of that great crowd.

*Which when the people  
Had the full view of, such a noise arose  
As the shrouds make at sea in a stiff tempest,  
As loud and to as many tunes.*

The people of London wanted to be done with the politic delays, compromises and hesitations of the Asquith Administration.

Mr. Lloyd George told His Majesty that with the help of Mr. Bonar Law he hoped to be able to form a Government, and that if support failed him in the House of Commons, he would propose to dissolve Parliament and go to the country.

On Thursday, Lloyd George met the Labour Party, and offered them terms, including a seat in the War Council for Mr. Henderson, the creation of a Labour Department, several Under-Secretaryships and various commitments in policy. Thus Mr. Lloyd George, having secured himself on every side, on Thursday evening went to the Palace again and kissed hands as Prime Minister.

As for Carson, according to Lord Beaverbrook, "the moment

that Asquith's fall was accomplished, a kind of incuriousness seemed to descend upon him. He was like a man whose task is accomplished. He made no claim for himself."<sup>1</sup>

He did indeed refuse the only office which could really have tempted him. As they were going over the list of vacancies Lloyd George said, "There's the Lord Chancellor. That will be for you, Carson."

"No," said Carson, "that will not be for me," and he explained that there might be difficulty with the Government over Ireland, in which case, should he think it right to resign, he would not have it said that a resignation was no sacrifice which carried with it a pension of £6,000 a year.

In the event he went to the Admiralty, which, according to Lord Beaverbrook, he "really did not want," with a seat on the War Council when naval and military matters were being discussed. "We shall have to go and live at the Admiralty," Lady Carson noted in her Diary, on Friday. "Sir John Jellicoe came to see Edward after dinner. Sir Robert Finlay came in after tea. He is going to be Lord Chancellor. He is so pleased."

We may take it as reasonably certain that Carson used his influence to find a seat on the War Council for his friend Lord Milner, with whom all through those times he was in close touch.

On Friday, Carson went to the House of Lords, where the Slingsby Appeal was being somewhat contemptuously dismissed, and then to the War Office, where he congratulated the new Prime Minister on that change which he, more than any other man, had brought about. Carson had worked for the fall of Mr. Asquith, because he felt, as most men felt at that time, that under his leadership, there could be neither decision nor victory. There was, besides, the system, ponderous and ineffectual. Almost a year before, on the 2nd November, 1916, when explaining his own resignation, Carson had condemned as disastrous in war the Cabinet of twenty-two which then existed. "What is wanted for war-time," he said, "is a small number, the smaller the better, of competent men sitting not once a week but from day to day with the best expert advisers they can get working out the problems that arise in the course of the day." Mr. Asquith had preferred his War Committee inside the Cabinet, of which

<sup>1</sup> *Politicians and the War*, p. 385.

Carson added, "I would much prefer to see the right hon. gentleman cut his Cabinet down even to five or six from twenty-two, placing on those five or six the whole burden of responsibility, and then the country would know there was no divided responsibility or anything of that kind." For that system he had worked; in that cause he had won.

"Edward attended the War Council," Lady Carson notes in her Diary on Saturday, December 9th, 1916, "he says more was done in a few hours than used to be done in a year."

## CHAPTER XXIII

### *First Lord*

"Very much at sea" – Justice – Munitions – Sleepless nights – Jellicoe – Beatty.

WE get a hint of the new First Lord's conception of his work at the Board of Admiralty in a letter of the 18th December, 1916, to his friend Gibson Bowles. "I feel full of responsibility," Carson wrote, "but you may be quite sure I will try to get the fullest play for the Navy; and I don't intend to become an amateur in naval strategy or tactics. The submarine peril is a deadly one, and I am turning all attention to it."

These simple principles, not to meddle in strategy or tactics, but to give the Navy the fullest play, were the guiding rules that the Minister laid down for himself from the beginning. In his first day at the Admiralty, he called into his room all the principal officers and said to them, "Now, gentlemen, I think we should know one another. Some of you may possibly have heard of me as a lawyer of some eminence; but that is not why I am here. I am here, gentlemen, because I know nothing at all about the job. My only great qualification," he added, "for being put at the head of the Navy is that I am very much at sea."

They all laughed, and from that moment got on well together. Carson stuck to his resolution not to interfere in technical matters. One day Sir Henry Oliver, Deputy Chief of the Naval Staff, sent one of his officers to invite the First Lord into the room in which they were making dispositions to intercept some German ships of which they had news. Carson thanked him. "But if," he said, "I go into your room, one officer will be told off to see that the First Lord has a comfortable chair, and another will be showing me the place on the chart, and you will be wasting your time, and at the end of it all, my opinion will be worth nothing to you." So Carson declined the kind invitation. If Mr. Winston Churchill and Mr. Lloyd George had taken



a similar view of their Ministerial duties, the Departments might have been saved some trouble and the country some brilliant—and costly—adventures.

Carson held that the chief duty of a Minister in his Department was to hold the scales impartially, to see that every officer and man in the service had justice and fair treatment, and to give a swift and true decision upon points of principle and administration. To those ends he devoted a mind well versed both in justice and in human nature, and the Service felt and was grateful for this benignant influence.

A case in point may serve to illustrate this ruling characteristic. At a meeting of the Board, when the Secretary was hurrying over an item on the agenda, relating to the dismissal of an officer—a naval chaplain who had been found unsuitable—Carson stopped him and asked for the papers. There being no papers on the table, he inquired as to the procedure. "Oh," said the Secretary, "the usual thing, minutes from two Lords for submission to the Board." "Which of the Lords present have reported?" Carson asked. There being no answer—"Then," said Carson, "put this case back, and let me have a report." And then, with a chuckle, "I may know nothing about naval strategy; but I do know something about legal procedure."

And so, throughout, the First Lord was always quick to see that no injustice was done, to high or low, in the Department, even in the haste and urgencies of war.

There were more technical matters in which the First Lord took an anxious interest. Thus, there had been complaints of the ammunition served out to the Fleet both in respect of shells which burst on impact instead of perforating the enemy's armour and bursting beyond, and of explosions of the magazines of our ships when not in action, without ascertainable cause. On the 1st March, 1917, Captain F. C. Dreyer,<sup>1</sup> who had been Sir John Jellicoe's flag captain in H.M.S. *Iron Duke*, in the Battle of Jutland, was appointed Director of Naval Ordnance, in succession to Rear-Admiral Morgan Singer. Captain Dreyer, a distinguished gunnery officer, who had made a special study of explosives, set himself (in collaboration with the shell manufacturers and the Woolwich experts) to design a more efficient

<sup>1</sup> Later, Admiral Sir Frederic Dreyer.

type of armour-piercing shells for the great guns of the Fleet, and provide them besides with better bursters and fuses. He also increased the severity of the inspection and raised the standard of excellence of the constituents of the cordite. In the course of his investigations he made discoveries which (as Carson used to say) gave him as First Lord many a sleepless night. Some of the cordite and some of the shells already in the Fleet had been served out during the tremendous pressure of war work, although they had not passed the established acceptance tests. Steps immediate and energetic were taken to replace the faulty stuff. The cordite cartridges being marked in "lots" were changed without much difficulty; but those projectiles which were not up to standard had no paint-mark on them by which they could be told at a glance, but had to be identified by the numbers on their bases, a heavy and tedious job. Carson drew a long sigh of relief when this anxious work was done.<sup>1</sup> Carson, moreover, set himself to know his Department. With Admiral Oliver as guide, he made weekly visits to the various offices. "After six months of this," he said to the Admiral, "I shall know enough to make changes." There were, however, as we shall see, changes to be made at once, and the First Lord, for all his modesty, was found equal to the task.

Carson had come to what was practically a new Board, for Sir John Jellicoe had been transferred from command of the Grand Fleet to the Admiralty only a few days before the change of Government, and with him Sir Cecil Burney, who had been in command of the First Battle Squadron, became Second Sea Lord. Rear-Admiral Tudor was Third; Commodore Lionel Halsey, who had been serving as Captain of the Fleet, was Fourth; and Commodore G. M. Paine, Fifth Sea Lord; Mr. E. G. Pretyma, who had been at the Board of Trade, was Civil Lord, and Sir Francis Hopwood (afterwards Lord Southborough) additional Civil Lord.

Carson struck up a firm and cordial understanding with the First Sea Lord. From the beginning these two liked and trusted each other. "He was in my opinion, for what it was worth," Carson said long afterwards of Sir John Jellicoe, "the best man

<sup>1</sup> See Lord Jellicoe in *The Grand Fleet, 1914-18*, and *The Crisis of the Naval War*.

at his job that I met with in the whole course of the war—for knowledge, calmness, straightness, and the confidence he inspired in his officers.”

“I cannot forbear,” says Lord Jellicoe, “to mention the extreme cordiality of Sir Edward Carson’s relations with the Board in general and myself in particular. His devotion to the naval service was obvious to all and in him the Navy possessed indeed a true and a powerful friend.”

Together they set about the work of reorganisation. “Sir Edward,” says Jellicoe, “very quickly saw the necessity for a considerable strengthening of the Staff. In addition to the newly formed and rapidly expanding Anti-Submarine Division of the Naval Staff, he realised that the Operations Division also needed increased strength, and that it was essential to relieve the First Sea Lord of the mass of administrative work falling upon his shoulders.... In the early spring of 1917 the illogical nature of the staff organisation became apparent, in that it had no executive functions, and as the result of discussions between Sir Edward Carson and myself the decision was taken that the duties of the Naval Staff . . . should be made executive, and that the First Sea Lord should assume his correct title as Chief of the Naval Staff, as he had in fact already assumed the position.”<sup>1</sup>

There are among Carson’s papers a series of letters in the bold strong hand of Sir David Beatty, which show how Sir Edward Carson made himself acquainted with another side of his duties. “Thank you for your letter,” the Commander-in-Chief wrote on the 17th December, 1916, “I am delighted to hear of your intention to make periodic visits to the Grand Fleet. I will at all times communicate freely with you on questions connected with my command. The first essential is to meet. Letters are unsatisfactory to commence such an important understanding as should exist.” Then Admiral Beatty explained that after going to sea to exercise he would be at Rosyth, at the beginning of the year, “where perhaps it may be possible for you to come.” . . . “May I congratulate you,” he added, “on your appointment and the Navy on having you at its head.” In the second of these letters the visit is more definitely fixed—“any day after the 5th during the following week. . . . There are, of

<sup>1</sup> Lord Jellicoe, *The Crisis of the Naval War*, ch. i.

course, many points and questions to consider and discuss which I think would repay giving some little time to them. I am very averse from leaving the sea and coming to London because at any moment the occasion may arise and that would be a tragedy from my point of view if I were not there." Thus Carson began those monthly visits to the Grand Fleet which continued during his time at the Admiralty.

"I hope," Beatty wrote to Carson on the 29th March, 1917, "you will persuade the Prime Minister to come to Rosyth. I think it is of the very greatest importance that he should have personal knowledge of what manner of man I am. We are, it seems to me, at a stage of the war when we must face facts. We have not been successful in tackling many of the most important and really vital questions by our inherent natural dislike to looking facts straight in the face. We are led away by side issues and hope that the main disagreeablenesses will settle themselves, and find in the end that they have grown more formidable than they were before. And we are not making use or the best use of the brains that we possess. I have written to Jellicoe suggesting coming down to Rosyth on the 4th or 5th. . . . But in any case I hope you will be able to get away then, as I am sure these conversations are of immense value to me and it gives you the opportunity of hearing the sea side of the questions. Generally speaking I am very disturbed at the outlook caused by enemy submarines and raiders. But I feel that they both can be defeated."

Beatty, as we gather from the correspondence, opened his mind freely to Carson upon various subjects on which he felt strongly. One was the vexatious delays of the Board in adopting his suggestions or answering his letters:

"Illustrative," as he wrote to Carson, "of the inordinate dislike of their Lordships to receive suggestions. But while pretending to disagree in almost every particular, ended by practically adopting all the recommendations and the principle of reorganisation. They remind me of Donna Julia in *Don Juan*."

Jellicoe, when Carson referred the matter to him, made his defence, and it may be said here that although the two sailors had their well-known differences, Beatty assured Carson that, in

his opinion, Jellicoe was the best equipped man in the Service for the post of First Sea Lord.

"As to my memories of Lord Carson at that time," Lord Beatty long afterwards wrote to the author of this book, "I can only corroborate—that our relations were of the happiest character and no Commander-in-Chief could have experienced a closer and more helpful understanding than existed between the First Lord and myself during the period we worked together."

Carson adopted the method of making notes of all the points raised by the Commander-in-Chief, so that they might be considered by the Board of Admiralty upon his return to Whitehall. By these means, delays and misunderstandings between the Fleet and Admiralty were avoided, and many points settled which might otherwise have consumed precious time in correspondence.

## CHAPTER XXIV

### *Submarine*

The new German hope – Jellicoe's measure – The chase – Jack-the-Giant-Killer – The convoy system – Lack of destroyers – Lord Riddell – The blockade – America to the rescue – President Wilson and Ireland.

BEATTY need not have feared the tragedy of missing a battle. The great and bloody fight of Jutland, which Mr. Lloyd George in his letter to Carson had called a "terrible disaster," was in effect a victory so decisive that the German sailors never again ventured to contest the command of the surface of the sea; but thenceforth concentrated on the conquest of a darker and more shadowy realm.

To blockade the British Isles by submarine—such was the new German hope. And to that end they proposed to sink not only British ships on showing the flag, but all ships, British or neutral, and at sight. This new policy of "unrestricted" submarine warfare was only adopted after a stiff fight between the civil and military authorities. "Germany," von Jagow, the Foreign Minister, protested, "will be treated like a mad dog against which everybody combines"; and the Chancellor, Bethmann Hollweg, warned the High Command that the United States of America would not suffer such an outrage without the sharp retaliation of war. Peace approaches were first tried: but when Mr. Asquith's Administration fell, and the new Prime Minister declared, on the 19th December, 1916, against the German proposal to enter into a conference, then Ludendorff took the matter up again with the Chancellor. On January 9th, 1917, at Pless, in presence of the Emperor, on the advice of Hindenburg, the decision was taken: "the unrestricted U-boat campaign shall begin on February 1, in full force."<sup>1</sup>

In the meantime the U-boat commanders had been making

<sup>1</sup> *Official History of the War* (Naval Operations), vol. iv., pp. 233 *et seq.*

ever broader encroachments upon the flimsy rules of war, and the British Admiralty received good warning of the thunderbolt within the cloud. Late in October 1916, Admiral Jellicoe had written to the Board that the losses in merchant ships might, "by the early summer of 1917 have such a serious effect upon the import of food and other necessities," as to force the Allies to accept an unfavourable peace, and proposed measures to meet the menace. The Admiralty urged upon the Government a similar view of "the most formidable and the most embarrassing" of all the problems which it had to consider. As we have seen from his letter to Gibson Bowles, the First Lord himself "turned all attention" to this "deadly peril" from the day he joined the Board. "The earliest conversations between the First Lord and myself," says Jellicoe, "had relation to the submarine menace, and Sir Edward Carson threw himself wholeheartedly into the work."

One of the first measures of the Board was to form an Anti-Submarine Division, at the head of which was put Rear-Admiral Duff, who had been Second in Command of the 1st Battle Squadron. In the reorganisation of which we have spoken, Rear-Admiral Duff became Assistant Chief of the Naval Staff and Captain W. W. Fisher was brought from the Fleet to take charge of the Anti-Submarine Division. Success in such matters is usually the outcome of that painful process called Trial and Error. The Admiralty considered many devices, but concentrated on several which were directed to the ends of fighting, hunting, trapping and confining the submarines.

The arming of our mercantile marine promised well from past experience. In 1915 none of the ships which had been armed had been sunk; but as the German submarine improved in power and range so it gained advantage over the armed merchantman; in December 1916, twelve, and, in January 1917, twenty vessels were sunk in spite of their guns. Nevertheless, as Carson pointed out in the House of Commons,<sup>1</sup> of armed merchantmen there were almost 70 to 75 per cent, and of unarmed merchantmen only 24 per cent, which survived attack, so the Admiralty pressed on with this armament in spite of growing losses. The guns had at least this advantage, that they compelled the submarine

<sup>1</sup> On 21st February, 1917, *Parl. Deb.*, vol. xc., c. 385.

to keep under water, and depend on torpedoes, of which his supply was limited by the smallness of his stowage.

As for the hunt, everything that could be spared or improvised in the way of cruisers, destroyers, submarines, patrol boats and armed trawlers was pressed into service. The hydrophone and the depth-charge were developed and applied as the fight went on. The Admiralty made desperate attempts to close the Straits of Dover with barrages of mines and wired nets, and to close the outlets of the German harbours with minefields. There were, besides, ingenious traps and decoy-ships designed to lure the U-boat to destruction.

All these devices combined had at first but a scanty measure of success: the heavy tides and storms of the Channel tangled up and swept away the wire nets and barrages; the Germans cleared the minefields round their home waters almost as soon as they were laid. Moreover, the British mine was a cheap and ineffectual machine which either failed to explode or speedily filled and sank. On the 29th March and again on the 17th April, 1917, the Commander-in-Chief wrote urgently to the First Lord on the subject. "I hope," said Sir David Beatty, "you get something definite out of the Minister of Munitions and 4th Sea Lord Conference *re* Mines. From all Jellicoe told me and all that I gleaned of our mines in present use I am more convinced than ever that we are entirely dependent upon a mine that will go off in sufficient quantities to win the war. We have not started to do that yet, and the new Board has been in being five months. We must think of it on the largest scale possible or we shall be done in and it will be the lack of foresight of the Navy that has caused our defeat." It was not until the Admiralty procured a specimen of the greatly superior German mines and had it copied in large numbers that any real progress was made with the laying of minefields. In the meantime the German yards were busy. Flights of ever stronger, larger and more powerfully armed submarines either broke through the Channel or cruised round Cape Wrath, appearing here there and everywhere, lurking along every approach to our harbours and taking ever heavier toll of the incoming and outgoing merchant vessels. Everything under every flag, with a few well-calculated exceptions, was sunk at sight, so that even the hospital ships were



driven to abandon their distinctive devices and were armed like the others.

Carson told the House very frankly the difficulties of coming to any conclusions as to the success or failure of this uncertain and delusive chase. The hunt had got to grips with the quarry forty times in eighteen days; the submarine dived and often was thought to be sunk; but there could be no certainty unless prisoners were taken. He gave illustrations: one case in which the captain was killed and the crew taken—an absolute certainty; a second in which a transport had struck a submarine, and from her own damage showed proof that she had sunk it; a third in which two patrol boats had engaged two submarines and reported sinking them both but could bring no absolute proof; a fourth in which a submarine was rammed by a destroyer and believed to be destroyed; a fifth in which a conning tower was run over and struck; a sixth in which a patrol boat collided with a submerged object thought to be the submarine she had been fighting; the seventh a registered hit on a submarine's conning tower; an eighth case in which an aeroplane dropped a bomb on a U-boat in the act of diving. Such illustrations, as Carson cited them to show, only served to illustrate the tantalising uncertainties of the struggle.<sup>1</sup>

Mr. Lloyd George (in his *War Memoirs*) succumbs to the temptation, so strong in the hearts of all of us, to be the hero of every fight, the Jack who kills every giant. Those Departments of State which might be thought to have had some small hand in the business are less a help than a hindrance. As with the War Office, which impeded his victorious advances in campaigns unrealised, so with the Board of Admiralty in this submarine warfare. It existed only to balk his genius and baffle his energy. The "fear-dimmed eyes of our Mall Admirals," the "trembling hand" of Sir John Jellicoe; the "stunned pessimism" of the "palsied and muddle-headed Admiralty," their "crass and cruel" mishandling of their job, serve as a dark background to the foresight, wisdom and courage of the statesman.

To the historian there seems nothing "fear-dimmed" or "paralytic" about the measures of the Admiralty at that time. That the Department moved more slowly than the swift, eager,

<sup>1</sup> Parl. Deb., H. of C., vol. xc., cc. 1870 *et seq.*, 21st February, 1917.

unimpeded mind of the Prime Minister was in the nature of things. If they made mistakes and miscalculations it was because they were actively testing every weapon in the search for such as might give them victory.

There was, however, one defence, and that the most successful, which they are charged with being slow in adopting, the convoy system. The escort of troopships, transport, and other important vessels had been undertaken by the Admiralty with notable success throughout the war; but the bulk of our mercantile marine went their ways unprotected save by the patrols until the spring of 1917.

As a general measure there were certain heavy disadvantages in the convoy system which at first swayed the merchant service against it. The merchantman, sailing freely by itself, could turn round more often, could load and discharge more cargoes in a given time, was in every way a more efficient vessel, than as one of a fleet, first waiting for the collection of its consorts and then sailing at the pace of the slowest vessel. In the same way the loading and unloading and the railway transport of the cargoes could be worked more speedily and efficiently with a steady flow of ships than with fleets which made a glut or a famine on arrival or departure. Convoys, then, from the point of view of the mercantile marine, meant a heavy loss in the available tonnage.<sup>1</sup> The merchantmen preferred, as long as the sinkings were comparatively low, to sail at their own time and their own speed and take their chances.

There was another objection to the convoy system, from the point of view of the merchantman, in the need to "keep station" accurately enough for the purpose. These objections were made by ten masters of merchantmen called into conference by the Admiralty in February 1917. Mr. Lloyd George puts down their doubts to "the arrogant sense of superiority which induces the uniformed chauffeur of a Rolls Royce to look down on the driver of what is contemptuously stigmatised as a 'tin Lizzie.'"<sup>2</sup> But as a matter of fact the skippers consulted were drawn from almost every class of merchant-ship, from the liner to the tramp, and their objections were based

<sup>1</sup> See Fayle, *Sea-borne Trade*, vol. iii., pp. 97 *et seq.*

<sup>2</sup> *War Memoirs*, vol. iii., p. 1154.

not on any contempt for their own service, but on the lack of special apparatus, of special training and of the uniform quality of fuel with which the Navy was equipped. Moreover, in heavy weather, as they pointed out, light vessels and well-laden consorts of different speeds and different sailing capacities would be difficult to keep together, the more as they were deprived of many of their best officers and men by the demands of the Navy and the auxiliary services. So far from these objections being "fallacious and fantastic," as Mr. Lloyd George calls them, bad station-keeping remained a serious danger to the end of the war. Thus, in February 1918, we find the Admiralty circularising shipowners: "Great improvement in the matter of station-keeping is urgently called for, as with the limited number of destroyers and other escort craft available, it is impossible to afford efficient protection to a convoy scattered over an area of several miles."

As far as the Atlantic trade was concerned, the chief ports of departure belonged to a neutral who refused to allow the arrangements of convoy to be made by the Admiralty in her home waters, so that the convoy would have had to be met in the Atlantic, a rendezvous very difficult to arrange.

But the chief difficulty of all lay in the lack of sufficient destroyers to convoy the mercantile marine. The Grand Fleet being the chief piece on the board, without which all was lost, the Admiralty rightly considered that its needs came first, and it could not take the sea without a sufficient screen of cruisers and destroyers. The numerous "sideshows"—Salonika, the Persian Gulf, East Africa, as well as the patrols in the North Sea, at Dover, in the Channel and the Mediterranean—all made heavy demands on the Navy and its auxiliaries. "It was not," says Lord Jellicoe, "until late in 1915 that the number of destroyers attached to the Grand Fleet was sufficient to screen the Battle Fleet adequately, and an anti-submarine screen for the cruisers was not available until the end of 1916."<sup>1</sup> And when Jellicoe, in 1916, proposed to organise the Scandinavian trade into a convoy he was obliged to postulate the laying-up of one of his battle squadrons in order to obtain destroyers

<sup>1</sup> See introduction by Lord Jellicoe to *The German Submarine War*, by R. H. Gibson and Maurice Prendergast.

for the work. To organise the convoy system with inadequate protection would have been to court wholesale instead of retail destruction. Nor is it true to say, as has been alleged by several writers who ought to know better, that the Admiralty was deceived by a weekly return of entrances and clearances supplied by the Customs authorities, which included small craft and coast-wise traffic. This fable is on the face of it grotesque, and there is the best authority for saying that the return in question was never seriously considered in the Board of Admiralty.<sup>1</sup>

Thus it was chiefly a question of ways and means, of sooner or later; the objections of the Admiralty rested not on mere obstructiveness, as Mr. Lloyd George suggests, but upon practical grounds. The French coal trade organised in March 1917 was a convoy in its elementary form, depending rather on route protection and night voyages than on station-keeping. So in its beginnings was the Scandinavian Convoy; the weekly "beef-trip" between Holland and the Thames, also a short run, was under the escort of the Harwich Force. The Atlantic trade was completely beyond our powers, not only because of the difficulty of the ports being in neutral hands but because the great force of cruisers, armed merchantmen, destroyers and sloops required for the work of convoy did not exist. Only when the United States entered the war, in April 1917, was it possible even to begin to obtain a sufficiency of ships for these duties.

In the meantime Carson counselled faith, patience, courage. "The nation," he said, "must have confidence in us. The nation must have patience and I believe the nation will have patience if the real situation is told them." He did not conceal the extent of our losses. "Last month," he said, "nearly half a million tons of shipping were sunk. This means, if the same rate goes on, nearly six million tons of shipping in the year. (This is not British tonnage, which is almost half that amount.) Plain talking and drastic action in accordance with the situation lead to confidence. . . . Our people, I believe, if they are told it is a question of their sticking it out or the Huns sticking

<sup>1</sup> See Mr. Lloyd George's *War Memoirs*, p. 1146, for the charge, and Captain Bertram H. Smith, late Trade and Mercantile Movements Division, Admiralty War Staff (*British Legion Journal*, February 1935), for the refutation.

it out, will one and all say—‘No matter what they do, we will stick it out and see it through to the end.’”<sup>1</sup> The Navy, he told them, was doing all that men could do. Let them trust the Navy.

We get an interesting glimpse of these anxious times from that excellent journalist, Lord Riddell, who notes in his *Diary* under March 10th, 1917, that he called at the Admiralty by appointment to see Sir Edward Carson:

“Suggested he should issue a statement to the Editors acquainting them with the seriousness of the position and giving details. He said he welcomed the suggestion and would prepare and send me a paper. He referred to the fact that we had been losing tonnage at the rate of 500,000 tons per month and that the diminution of imports proposed by the P.M. amounted to only the same figure. The shipping losses are of course cumulative, and on the average the tonnage lost each month would transport more than 500,000 tons. He considers that we shall soon be faced with a serious shortage of food, and mentioned that the stock of grain in the country only equals the consumption for about three months.”

On the 5th of April, Riddell called again, and noted that Carson “still takes a gloomy view and thinks his colleagues too optimistic. He says the Germans are putting out more submarines than we are destroying, and that if the war continues the result must be very serious. . . . He referred to the strain of his work due to the frequent losses of our ships, and said that he often left the office absolutely worn out. He thinks Lloyd George’s energy and spirits wonderful, and inquired to what I attributed them. I replied, ‘Temperament and the ability to take short snatches of sleep when exhausted.’”<sup>2</sup>

The letter thus agreed upon between these two anxious men put in extended terms the points noted in the *Diary*. The position was “very serious”; the losses might be six million tons of shipping or thereabouts for the twelve months: “The nation must understand that it may be called upon to make even greater sacrifices and that the extent of these must depend in a large measure upon an immediate realisation of the position

<sup>1</sup> At the Aldwych Club, 8th March, 1917.

<sup>2</sup> Lord Riddell’s *War Diary*, pp. 284–40.

and upon the institution of rigid economies. . . . The drastic restrictions on imports will seriously affect many businesses. . . . The public must be convinced that these measures are absolutely necessary in the public interest. . . .”<sup>1</sup> Carson, it is plain, spared no pains to make the nation realise its danger and its duty.

There was another question upon which it was natural that public opinion should demand assurances—the Blockade. We were supposed to be blockading Germany; but here was Germany blockading us, and it looked as if the German blockade of England might be more effectual than the British blockade of Germany. That there had been slackness on the British side Carson himself well knew. Three and a half months had elapsed before enemy reservists were stopped from going into Germany; seven months before we declared a blockade and seized goods other than contraband; ten months before we used the most powerful lever we possessed, the coal exports, in order to restrain the exports of the Scandinavian countries, and thirteen months before cotton was made contraband. Was Germany really being blockaded even then? So men grumbled.<sup>2</sup>

There is evidence that the First Lord had been pressing this subject both upon the Foreign Office and the Prime Minister. Thus on the 20th December, 1916, we find him writing to Mr. Lloyd George:

“As I told you in a former letter, I am very anxious about the conditions of affairs in Holland, as I have had several letters and visitors complaining of the weakness there.

“The enclosed is from a correspondent who has written to me many suggestions from time to time which I have passed on to the Foreign Office. This I do not like to send there; but perhaps you would yourself order some inquiry to satisfy you as to whether our Minister there is doing all that is possible.”

We do not know what the particular complaint was, but it was stated in the House of Commons some time later that, in a single quarter of the year 1916, Holland had exported into Germany more than twenty-six thousand tons of cheese, and there was indignation that in these circumstances we should

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 29.

<sup>2</sup> *Parl. Deb., H. of C.*, 27th March, 1917, c. 238. Speech of Commander Bellair.

be allowing Holland to supply herself with fertilisers and feeding stuffs from England or from overseas.

Moreover, Captain Consett, our Naval Attaché in Denmark, had written an indignant memorandum to show that whereas in 1913 Denmark had sent 232,996 tons of food to England and 104,148 tons of food to Germany, in 1916 she had exported only 91,195 tons of food to England and 116,980 tons of food to Germany. "Throughout all the negotiations which have taken place," he complained, "the Danes have on every occasion succeeded in throwing dust in the eyes of H.M.'s Government—in fact . . . the Danes have been too clever for us." Was it right, he asked, that the Danes should be allowed to import coal, petroleum, feeding stuffs and fertilisers in enormous quantities (which he specified) in order to feed the enemy? Now it had never been an easy matter to organise a blockade of Germany through neutral countries, on which we ourselves to some extent depended. The British blockade, nevertheless, had been greatly strengthened, no doubt by the constant trial of new methods, so that by 1917, at all events, there was complete harmony between the Admiralty and the Foreign Office on the subject. Thus we find Mr. Balfour writing to Carson on the 27th March of that year:

"Bob Cecil told me yesterday that you were going to speak in the Debate this afternoon. I am extremely glad to hear it. I think it of absolutely vital importance that an end should be put to these mischievous attacks on our blockade system; and, as these really rest upon the idiotic view that the Blockade Department of the Foreign Office is hampering the Navy in its efforts to stop German supplies, nothing but an emphatic statement from the responsible Heads of the Admiralty can put it right.

"In short what you say in the Debate seems to me of greater importance than even the most carefully argued speech by the Minister of Blockade."

This suspicion, as we have seen, was—at one time—not so idiotic as Mr. Balfour supposed. Our Naval Attaché in Denmark, at least, had been emphatic on the subject, and Carson himself had not been altogether silent. But the First Lord responded whole-heartedly to the appeal of the Secretary of State and made

an energetic defence of our Blockade policy. He had gone into the matter and found that in the opinion of the Admiralty the policy of the Foreign Office was "the only possible policy having regard to the complications that would ensue if you tried to adopt a more aggressive attitude towards neutrals with whom we are on perfectly friendly terms." The arrangements concluded between the Foreign Office and the neutrals were the only alternative to bringing every ship into Kirkwall and into the Prize Court. Would anyone say what other course they could pursue? Could they deny the right of America to trade with neutral countries? And was it reasonable to apply the doctrine of continuous voyage to feeding-stuffs and say that because the foodstuff was used to fatten pigs and some of the pigs might go into Germany, the foodstuff ought not to be allowed to go into the neutral countries? "On the face of that you might starve the Danes or the Dutch or other neutrals. How do you know when bread goes into Norway that the Norwegian who feeds upon it may not join the German Army? There is continuous voyage for you!"

As Carson well knew, the time was already past when these controversies mattered. The Germans were by that time making a scarcity in Holland and Scandinavia by the terror of their submarines, and on the 6th of April, 1917, goaded into it by their frightfulness, the United States entered the war. The last chapter in that story will be found in the *Life and Letters of Walter H. Page*:

"'Mr. Balfour,' said Mr. Polk, 'it took Great Britain three years to reach a point where it was prepared to violate all the laws of blockade. You will find it will take us only two months to become as great criminals as you are!'

"And the State Department," continues Mr. Hendrick, "was as good as its word. It immediately forgot all the elaborate 'notes' and 'protests' which it had been addressing to Great Britain. It became more inexorable than Great Britain had ever been in keeping foodstuffs out of neutral countries that were contiguous to Germany. Up to the time the United States entered the war, Germany, in spite of the watchful British Fleet, had been obtaining large supplies from the United States through Holland, Denmark and the Scandinavian Peninsula. But the



United States immediately closed these leaks. In the main this country adopted a policy of 'rationing'; that is, it would furnish the little nations adjoining Germany with precisely the amount of food they needed for their own consumption. This policy was to be one of the chief influences in undermining the German people and forcing their surrender."<sup>1</sup>

Carson must have heaved a sigh of relief as he anticipated these results and thought, too, of the flotillas of American destroyers which were to make the extension of the convoy system possible. But the gods always mix those gifts which mortals call good fortune. There was another consequence of the entry of America into the war, of which we get a hint in the pages of Mr. Page. President Wilson, in one of the first letters he wrote to the American Ambassador after the intervention, touched upon Ireland. "If," he said, "the American people were once convinced that there was a likelihood that the Irish question would soon be settled, great enthusiasm and satisfaction would result and it would also strengthen the co-operation which we are now about to organise between the United States and Great Britain. Say this in unofficial terms to Mr. Lloyd George but impress upon him its great significance."

The opportunity came at a dinner which Mr. Page gave towards the end of April 1917.

"I took him [Mr. Lloyd George]," the Ambassador reported to the President, "to a corner of the dressing-room and delivered your message to him about Ireland.

" 'God knows I'm trying,' he replied. 'Tell the President that and tell him to talk to Balfour.'

"Presently he broke out—'Madmen, madmen—I never saw any such task,' and he pointed across the room to Sir Edward Carson, his First Lord of the Admiralty—'Madmen.' 'But the President's right. We've got to settle it and we've got to settle it now.'

"Carson and Jellicoe came across the room and sat down with us. 'I've been telling the Ambassador, Carson, that we've got to settle the Irish question now—in spite of you.'

" 'I'll tell you something else we've got to settle now,' said Carson. 'Else it'll settle us. That's the submarines. The Press

<sup>1</sup> Burton J. Hendrick, *Life and Letters of Walter H. Page*, p. 265.

and public are working up a calculated and concerted attack on Jellicoe and me, and if they get us, they'll get you. It's an attack on the Government made on the Admiralty.'

" 'Prime Minister,' said this Ulster pirate whose civil war didn't come off only because the big war was begun—'Prime Minister, it may be a fierce attack. Get ready for it.' ”<sup>1</sup>

Sir Edward Carson evidently was thinking of matters more urgent than Ireland. Otherwise he might have retorted on Mr. Page by reminding him how America had fought in the great cause of Union, and would allow no foreign nation to interfere.

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., pp. 255 *et seq.*

## CHAPTER XXV

### *Ireland Again*

Political approaches – The writing on the wall – Carson's advice – "Who are about to die" – The Nationalists walk out.

THINGS had been going from bad to worse in Ireland. The Easter-Week Rebellion had brought no change in the spirit of the Administration, which continued to apologise for its existence while it left to the military the unpopular task of maintaining law and order. Mr. Duke (who had succeeded Mr. Birrell as Chief Secretary), although he belonged to the Conservative Party, followed the same fatal practice of concession and surrender. The Viceroy, the Lord Chancellor and the Solicitor-General were in effect the nominees of the Irish Nationalists, who maintained a precarious existence by propitiating sedition. At the Sheriffs' dinner in 1916, Lord Wimborne, the titular head of British rule in Ireland, said that in common with all present he disliked British rule. So low had the Administration fallen in its attempt to placate the implacable!

His friends in Dublin warned Carson, in letters repeated and urgent, that law and police were being brought into contempt and that nothing could save Ireland from a terrible fate but a firm and resolute administration of the law.

On the 18th October, 1916, an Enniscorthy correspondent wrote to the same effect: "Things here are bad, how bad it is not easy to gauge. The country is being quietly but strongly organised, and is being much more extensively armed than at the time of the rising. Last Saturday and Sunday the military were kept ready to march to any place requiring them. The police were ordered to remain in barracks all over the country and to be ready to evacuate their barracks and concentrate, on receipt of a telegram giving orders. . . . There were many rumours but things remained quiet. Two military officers in Ferns on Sunday night went to meet a friend at the railway station and

were followed by a howling mob. They went to the Barracks and found it barricaded with sandbags in the windows. The police would not let them in but gave them the loan of a rifle and they went home and sat up for the night.

"There is a story from Limerick that two cargoes of arms and ammunition were got into Limerick from America and shared by the Sinn Feiners. A third cargo was seized by the military. . . . Conscription is being used as a rallying cry to the ranks of the Sinn Feiners. John Redmond is quite cowed and the Irish Party as usual is answering the Whips of the Sinn Feiners and falling into line. The Government has reinstated the postal officers who took part in the rising in Enniscorthy and Ferns, and all confidential telegrams of the police go through these beauties. Madness gone mad I call it. . . ."

Thus Carson was well informed of the situation, and had he been Prime Minister would have known how to deal with it. His views, indeed, were expressed with sufficient clearness in a telegram of the 3rd February, 1917, to his Ulster friends: "With an enemy at our doors playing a game of desperation it would be sheer folly to divert our minds from anything but the prosecution of the war."<sup>1</sup> But Mr. Lloyd George was already thinking of another attempt to "reconcile" Ireland. There were certain political considerations which were very plainly stated in a letter of the 10th December, 1916, from Bishop O'Donnell in Donegal to his friend John Redmond—"With the Liberal Party in fairly solid Opposition, Lloyd George's Government appears to be very much at the mercy of the Irish Party. The Labour Party ask for a settlement of the Irish Controversy from the Government they have joined; and a Government containing Sir E. Carson can more readily than any other propose Home Rule of the right brand for all Ireland."

And the Bishop exhorted Redmond to hold out for good terms at whatever risk; arrange for nothing less than all Ireland, and "let these gentlemen have to come to you, instead of you going to them. Keep your distance and make them keep their place."<sup>2</sup>

Mr. Lloyd George was always quick off the mark; the day

<sup>1</sup> Telegram to Dawson Bates declining an invitation to a meeting of the Standing Committee, Ulster Unionist Council.

<sup>2</sup> Denis Gwynn, *Life of John Redmond*, pp. 534 *et seq.*

before this letter was written, three days after the new Government was formed, Mr. Redmond had been invited by the Prime Minister to come to see him.

The approaches at that interview were tentative and indefinite. Mr. Lloyd George did not intend to change the personnel of the Irish Government, which was to Mr. Redmond's liking: "He had been pressed to put in Campbell as Chancellor but refused." He intended to release the untried prisoners and revoke the martial law proclamation; he had first to discuss it with Carson, Bonar Law and Duke, "but he was determined to do it." If any move was made to impose conscription in Ireland, he would propose immediate Home Rule for all Ireland as a condition. Redmond thereupon told the Prime Minister that he would not have conscription at any price, and Lloyd George drew back: "he had no intention at present of making any move for settlement of the Irish question."

Nevertheless—"Hankey, the Military Secretary of the War Council, had put in a strong report that, as a purely war measure, the conciliation of Ireland was an imperative necessity."<sup>1</sup>

After this, Redmond might almost have believed what Mr. Duke told him only a week later—that the new Government proposals for an Irish settlement included "Duty to put Home Rule Act into operation for *all Ireland* at earliest possible moment with *necessary amendments*." Yet when the new Prime Minister referred to Ireland in the House of Commons it was publicly to damp such hopes. He had found, he said, a quagmire of distrust in that country which "made progress impossible." And yet, on the other hand, the Irish internees were released by Christmas 1916.

Then, towards the end of January 1917, T. P. O'Connor dined with Lloyd George and reported him to be a "little disturbed" by the active campaign of "McKenna, Gulland and other violent Asquithians." "Throughout the conversation he over and over again expressed his strong desire to keep on terms of friendship with the Irish Party." On the other hand, he was apprehensive of Protestant feeling in the North, and "Tay Pay" added that "he did not mention any conversation with Carson."

Now Redmond at that time was in the desperate situation

<sup>1</sup> Denis Gwynn, *Life of John Redmond*, pp. 584 et seq.

described by one of Carson's Dublin correspondents the previous Whitsuntide: "Redmond is like the G.P.O. in Sackville Street at present—if you glance at it it appears a handsome stone building but really there is nothing behind it, all burnt out. He and a few of his staff may stand for constitutional Home Rule, but his followers are all with the Sinn Feiners." On the 5th February, 1917, a Sinn Fein candidate, Count Plunkett, was returned for North Roscommon by an overwhelming majority. It was the writing on the wall.

What were the Nationalists to do? There must be a demonstration in the House of Commons—for "Home Rule without further delay," which might frighten the Prime Minister and appease the acrimony of their pursuers. They contrived to get a date for the debate—the 7th March, 1917.

Five days before that event the Prime Minister saw Carson and urged upon him the need for some expedient, like a Royal Commission, by way of setting things in train for settlement. He also left with him a memorandum by Professor Adams, who proposed an Irish Convention to find out what the Irish could agree upon that England might accept.<sup>1</sup> On the 3rd March, Sir Edward Carson addressed a long letter to Mr. Lloyd George on the whole subject. "I am quite convinced," he said, "that the idea of setting up a special Commission for the purposes of which you gave us an outline yesterday would not be really feasible. I feel certain that it would be misconstrued in the North of Ireland. . . . I need hardly say that the personal considerations do not influence me; but I am sure you will agree that it would be a great pity if the North of Ireland lost confidence in my judgment, having regard to the fact that in some way or other we must work out a settlement, if not before at least at the end of the war."

Then Carson touched on one great obstacle to settlement:

"The great difficulty about the Nationalist Party in the House of Commons at present is that they are not able to speak with anything like independent authority, and I am not sure that even if they came to an agreement they would carry with them the people in the South and West."

<sup>1</sup> W. G. S. Adams, Gladstone Professor of Political Theory and Institutions, Oxford.

Carson proceeded to advise the Prime Minister on the line to be taken with reference to the Irish motion in the House. The Government would be prepared to pass legislation if the Irish could come to an agreement; "and that you hoped men of all parties would attempt to bring this about." But without an agreement, the pledges of the late Government and "the very constitution (Government under a Coalition) necessary for carrying on the war prohibit it."

As to the Convention suggested by Professor Adams, Carson did not himself believe that it would lead to any useful result.

The Overseas members of the War Cabinet had arrived in London, and they too had entered into Lloyd George's Irish expedients; but Carson advised against using the Colonial delegates as a tribunal for framing a settlement: "I think you would find that they were averse from creating a precedent for interfering in our domestic affairs for fear it would lead to the correlative of this country interfering in the affairs of Canada in relation to Quebec." They would have to fear also the large Irish vote in the Colonies.

Carson's advice, then, was to leave matters alone. If the Irish were so unwise as to press matters to a division, "there would be great resentment in the present crisis in embarrassing the Government with questions of this kind."

In the light of this letter (of the 3rd March, 1917) we are the better able to understand what followed.

On the 5th March, T. P. O'Connor saw the Prime Minister again, and reported to Redmond:

"Lloyd George himself is quite ready to accept the Commission, but Carson blocks the way.

"Carson, apparently, is anxious for a settlement; but he thinks it would be impossible for him to accept it without losing all hold over his followers in Ulster. They would object to placing their rights at the mercy of a Commission. . . .

"Up to the time I left him Lloyd George did not see his way to force a settlement without Carson. As a matter of fact, however, I think he can do so. . . ."

Clearly, then, Lloyd George could be managed; he was with them at heart; the obstacle was Carson, and the debate of the 7th March, 1917, on the Government of Ireland, was directed

by the Irish Nationalists less against the Prime Minister than against the First Lord of the Admiralty.

It was to Carson especially that Major William Redmond, as "one of the tens of thousands of Irishmen who went . . . to France, many of whom will never return," made an appeal that moved and shook the House. "We here, who are about to die, perhaps, ask you to do that which our fathers and mothers taught us to long for; to do that which we all desire, make our country happy and contented. . . . I do appeal, with all the strength of my soul to the Government, to its leader and to the First Lord of the Admiralty to seize the opportunity which has now arisen."<sup>1</sup>

Although Carson did not speak, it is plain from its tenor that the Prime Minister's reply was balanced and restrained by Carsonian counsel. They were prepared, Mr. Lloyd George said, to give self-government to the South, but they were not prepared to coerce the North. And he laboured to persuade the Irish Nationalists that the surest method of obtaining Home Rule was to give inducements and facilities for Ulster to come in. This advice, however, was so little to the liking of the Irish Party that when the Prime Minister ended with the proposition that "Freedom means freedom for all, not merely for a section," there were cries of, "Are you free now?" and "Carson's Cabinet!"

John Redmond reinforced the simple eloquence of his brother with his own impassioned rhetoric. Why should all appeals be made to them? Why did the Prime Minister not appeal to the patriotism of the First Lord of the Admiralty? And again—"When you bring your measure down to this House, say to the right hon. gentleman, the First Lord of the Admiralty, that it is his duty to his King and Country to make the sacrifice necessary for the cause."

To emphasise the appeal, John Redmond, at the head of his party, marched out of the House.

<sup>1</sup> Parl. Deb., H. of C., vol. xci., cc. 447-8.



## CHAPTER XXVI

### *Carson's Scheme*

The franchise - Carson considers - A joint body - Lloyd George's after-thought - Too much to hope.

CARSON would have scorned to learn his duty to his King and Country from any Irish Nationalist, but the demonstration was well calculated to impress the Prime Minister, and there was a political consideration which may have influenced that statesman still more. He was considering vast changes in the electoral law and had to fear the defection of some of his Conservative supporters.

Carson, it will be remembered, had pressed the need for a new register the year before; but what he wanted was to give the new armies a voice in the national policy. A Speaker's Conference, which he had refused to join, had taken the matter in hand and enlarged his simple propositions into a vast scheme of electoral change to include the franchise for women, a great reduction of plural voting, the redistribution of seats, simultaneous elections, candidates' deposits, and the enlargement of the electorate from something over eight million to something over twenty million voters—all in the dead waist and middle of the war!

Lloyd George was pressing for a programme to include the whole of this electoral revolution; the debate was to take place on the 28th March, 1917, and on the 8th March he received this "disconcerting letter" from the First Lord of the Admiralty:

"Admiralty, Whitehall.

"8th March, 1917.

"MY DEAR PRIME MINISTER,

"The enclosed resolution signed by over 100 Unionist Members of Parliament was handed to me to-day and I think it right to bring it to your notice.

"Personally I was never in favour of the Speaker's Conference and declined to have any share in it.

"Yours sincerely,

"EDWARD CARSON."

The resolution enclosed expressed the reasonable view that the time was not opportune for such changes; that Parliament had been prolonged beyond its legal term for the prosecution of the war and not for such contentious measures, and that no proposals for Franchise Reform and Redistribution which did not include Ireland should be submitted to the Parliament of the United Kingdom. And Carson at the same time placed his office at the disposal of the Prime Minister.

It must have occurred to Mr. Lloyd George that the support of the Irish Nationalists would be a very useful balance against the possible loss of a hundred Conservative votes in the House of Commons.

However that may be, it is certain that when Ireland was debated again (on the 22nd March, 1917) Mr. Bonar Law on behalf of the Government announced: "We have decided that, in spite of the risks, it is worth while for us, on our own responsibility, in some way or another to make another attempt."<sup>1</sup>

The method was left vague; and we may take it that Carson was exhorted to contribute his ideas to this new attempt at "settlement."

Among Carson's papers there is a typewritten memorandum on Admiralty paper marked *Secret*, which begins in the following way:

"In view of the recent Debate in the House of Commons on Mr. O'Connor's motion, and the present situation, I feel it my duty to see if it is possible to make any further step to advance a settlement of the Home Rule question."

Now the debate on Mr. O'Connor's motion was on the 7th March; the second debate (on Sir Henry Dalziel's motion) was on the 22nd March. We may take it, then, that this memorandum was written by Sir Edward Carson some time between the 7th and 22nd March, 1917.

To judge by the way the paper is scored over and corrected,

<sup>1</sup> Parl. Deb., H. of C., vol. xci., c. 2187.

Carson found his task difficult. He tried, in the manner habitual with him, to reduce the problem to its simplest terms:

“The two broad factors at present are

- (1) That Ulster is to be excluded;
- (2) That the Nationalist Party refuse to consider any proposals on this basis.”

There was, however, Carson went on to point out, one ground of hope: the emphatic declaration of the Prime Minister against the coercion of Ulster, either then or after the war, ought to bring about in Ulster a feeling of confidence which might be turned to account. Building on the policy of non-inclusion without consent they might contemplate re-union of the whole of Ireland if the Irish Parliament were proved to be successful.

The Nationalist Party expressed their willingness to make any concession which would tempt Ulster into the Home Rule scheme, and although at that time Ulster would not agree to come in under any condition, still the conditions which could be offered to her should be stated in any amending Bill so as to leave it open to Ulster to accept the terms later on.

Then Carson considered such provisions as might succeed in that object. They would have to meet local conditions and local sentiment in the Six Counties, with due regard to the rights of the minority, the industries of the North of Ireland and the enactment and administration of the Labour Laws.

Carson proceeded to explain how it would be impossible to put the men in the shipyards and the linen trade under different laws from those of England and Scotland, owing to the intercourse and interchange of work between the North of Ireland and the yards of the Clyde and Mersey: the fear of the Belfast trade unions was that a Dublin Parliament would not understand these conditions. There was also education: while there was acquiescence under the system of a nominated Board, there would be apprehension of the changes an Irish Parliament might be inclined to make when dealing with a population mainly Roman Catholic.

Then after touching on the need for fairness in the provision for schools and in taxation, Carson came to the kernel of his scheme—the possibility of framing provisions for the summoning together of the Irish Parliament, or a committee thereof,

and the Ulster Members of the Imperial Parliament. The joint body thus created would be empowered to hold annual sessions alternately in Belfast and Dublin to consider legislative proposals for the whole of Ireland. When the Ulster Members (of the Imperial Parliament) were found to be in agreement with the views of the Dublin Parliament, Bills might be made applicable to the excluded counties by Order in Council.

This joint assembly, Carson went on to suggest, might be called the National Consultative Assembly of Ireland. He argued that the bringing together in this way of the Irish Parliament and the Ulster Members would be likely to lead to reconciliation; and, if the Irish Parliament showed a willingness to try and meet the views of the Ulster Members, "it would tend greatly to eliminate the distrust which at present exists."

After touching on the changes required in the Act, the need for an Irish Court of Appeal, to be appointed by the Imperial Parliament, for the whole of Ireland, and the financial provisions, Carson concluded:

"I do not know, of course, how far such a scheme would be acceptable to Ulster: but I would be prepared myself to press it on my supporters there, if it were useful in helping to settle the question. I have a very clear view that nothing could be worse than attempting to start off Ireland with a Parliament in which the Parties were merely taking sides in accordance with their religious views—as would certainly happen if the Home Rule Act as it stands were put into force. On the other hand, if at the commencement Ulster is eliminated, the overwhelming majority will be of the same religion. They would probably divide into groups of Moderates and Extremists—of those who are in favour of the British connection and those who are opposed to it; and when the Ulster Members eventually came in, they would probably become attached to some existing party and would not range themselves apart in religious division.

"Whether such a scheme as I have adumbrated would receive any sympathetic consideration by the present Irish Party in the House of Commons, I am unable to say, and I fear they would probably be guided more by how it would affect their position in Ireland than by consideration of the merits. But that is no reason why we should not make an effort.

"To sum up, I would suggest the appointment of a Commission to examine the various points I have raised and to frame a Bill making provision for carrying their conclusion into effect."

The Ulstermen went over to consult Carson when he was at the Board of Admiralty, and we may suppose that he laid his ideas before them; it is, at all events, reasonably certain that he could have brought his Ulster friends to agree. Here, then, was a scheme which, as far as Ulster went, gave hope that Home Rule might gradually come to be based upon consent. It gave besides to the Dublin Parliament the incentive to moderation, since it was based upon the idea of wooing and winning Ulster. But would the Irish Party agree to it? Carson no doubt calculated that the Nationalists were in a mood to accept anything in reason. It was their last chance. Yet much would depend on how the Prime Minister handled the negotiation.

Mr. Lloyd George, unfortunately, was attempting negotiations on his own account, and on different lines. Thus on the 29th April, 1917, he saw Devlin and T. P. O'Connor, and T. P. reported to Remond that :

"He is still very much afraid of breaking up his Ministry by the resignation of Carson, who, he says, may leave in one or other of two moods: either to save his face with the Orangemen, while more or less giving a perfunctory hostility to county option; or he may leave determined to fight. L. G. hopes that if he does have to leave it will be in the former spirit."

This suggests that the Prime Minister was thinking or at least talking about throwing over his colleague.

At that time he was being hard pressed on the subject, not only from Ireland, but from America. President Wilson, as we have seen, was instructing his Ambassador in London to make Mr. Lloyd George "settle the Irish question." No doubt also the Prime Minister was being told that another rebellion was imminent; his release of the Sinn Fein prisoners at Christmas had been so unfortunate in its results on the peace of the country that the Irish Police had been busy putting them back in prison ever since.

How ill-equipped was Mr. Lloyd George to handle an Irish negotiation we have already seen and must see again. It appears



LORD CARSON IN HIS STUDY AT CLEVE COURT

that on the 15th May, 1917, when John Redmond was attending a banquet in honour of General Smuts, he heard from his neighbour, a Liberal peer, "that Lloyd George had already written a letter to him making a formal offer for the immediate establishment of an Irish Parliament excluding the Six Counties of East Ulster."

Redmond said, of course, that no such offer could be accepted.

Thereupon the Liberal nobleman asked him for his alternative, and "Redmond said that he saw no hope now except by the summoning of an Irish Conference, representative of all interests, to draft a national constitution."

His neighbour was deeply impressed and said that he would immediately communicate the suggestion to Lloyd George.

"Early next morning he called upon Redmond to obtain his suggestions in writing for submission to the Cabinet, which was to meet at 11 o'clock. Decisive results followed immediately."<sup>1</sup>

Now the letter of which the Liberal peer had spoken to Redmond had probably been drafted by Carson: at any rate it proposed the Carsonian plan. The exclusion of the Six Counties, that is to say, was to be accompanied by "a Council of Ireland to be composed of two delegations, consisting on the one hand, of all the Members returned to Westminster from the excluded area, and, on the other, of a delegation equal in numbers from the Irish Parliament." This Council would be empowered by a majority of votes of each of the delegations to pass private Bills affecting both areas; to recommend to the Crown the extension to the excluded area by Order in Council of any Act of "the Irish" Parliament; "to agree to the inclusion, under the Home Rule Act, of the whole of Ireland subject to the assent of the majority of the voters in the excluded area . . ." and "to make recommendations on its own initiative upon Irish questions, including the amendment of the Home Rule Act as finally passed."

A Bill to this effect was to be introduced; the Financial Proposals of the Home Rule Act were to be reconsidered: "There are a number of important objects, such as the development of Irish industries, the improvement of housing in the towns, and the furtherance of education (including a better scale for the remuneration of teachers) which cannot . . . be adequately dealt

<sup>1</sup> Denis Gwynn, *Life of John Redmond*, p. 547.

with under the provisions of that Act without imposing an undue burden on the Irish taxpayer."

The Bill embodying these proposals, after being read a second time, was to be submitted to a Speaker's Conference for further consideration.

Here, then, was an offer complete in itself, and well calculated to reconcile the two parties. The Six Counties, indeed, were excluded, "subject to the reconsideration by Parliament at the end of five years," or to the action of the Council of Ireland, and this Council was provided to bring the two areas together in voluntary co-operation for the good of all Ireland. Immediate Home Rule for a part, ultimate reconciliation of the whole, financial inducements very alluring to the Irish Nationalists—it was an offer, which, had it been unaccompanied by any alternative, would have been difficult for Mr. Redmond to refuse.

Tim Healy, who had shrewd judgment in these matters, wrote to his brother on the 15th May, 1917: "Everyone will know to-morrow what Home Rule proposals will be. I understand they are—as the *Manchester Guardian* suggested yesterday—the exclusion of the Six Counties but some joint board between them and the twenty-six for certain purposes. The thing is repugnant; but the Party will take it rather than be diddled altogether."<sup>1</sup>

Now the main body of Mr. Lloyd George's letter to Redmond of the 16th May, 1917, was occupied by these proposals; but at the end of the letter was a passage, which, according to Mr. Denis Gwynn, "had been written as an after-thought, in response to Redmond's suggestions":

"We earnestly recommend the proposals which I have outlined above to the dispassionate consideration of men of all parties. If upon such consideration a basis for immediate action is found we shall proceed at once with the necessary steps to carry them into effect. If this should not be the case there remains an alternative plan, which, although it has been sometimes seriously discussed, has never been authoritatively proposed: that of assembling a convention of Irishmen of all parties for the purpose of producing a scheme of Irish self-government. . . . Would it be too much to hope that Irishmen of all creeds and parties might meet together . . . and finally compose the

<sup>1</sup> *Letters and Leaders of My Day.*



unhappy discords which have so long distracted Ireland. . . . The Government is ready, in default of the adoption of their present proposals for Home Rule, to take the necessary steps for the assembling of such a convention."<sup>1</sup>

It was, indeed, as any Irishman could have told Mr. Lloyd George, and as the event was to prove, a great deal too much to hope. It suggests besides an incorrigible vice in Mr. Lloyd George. He could not be loyal to a colleague nor trust an expert. Carson, who knew Ireland, had proposed a policy: it had been adopted by the Government and was to be offered to the Irish Nationalists. If there had been no alternative they might have taken it. But Mr. Lloyd George hesitates, hints to the Nationalists at throwing over Carson, and at the last moment takes from them their own suggestion which he proposes as an alternative. What could be expected from such treacheries but the confusion and disappointment with which, in the event, they were rewarded?

Mr. Redmond replied at once rejecting the Government policy and accepting his own.

A few days later the matter was debated in the House of Commons, and the Prime Minister promised that "if substantial agreement should be reached" the Government would "accept the responsibility for taking all the necessary steps to enable the Imperial Parliament to give legislative effect to the conclusions of the Convention."

If Carson was disappointed he concealed it. His proposal, after all, had been a forlorn hope. He had not in the slightest degree, as he told the House, modified his opinion which he had supported for thirty-five years, "that the best solution of Irish Government is the maintenance of the Union between Great Britain and Ireland." He had thought, nevertheless, that to tell the Ulstermen they could stand out until they should see it was their advantage to go in "and at the same time create a general Council which would bring all Irishmen together for Ireland's good" was the best hope for a settlement.

That, however, had been rejected, and he could not tell if the Unionist Council would accept the invitation. Whatever decision they might take he would be with them to the end: "I have

<sup>1</sup> Cmd. 8573 (1917).

not the least intention of deserting them in any way, for I value my honour far more than anything I could hold in the Government. . . ." He hoped, however, that the Convention would meet and that they would all enter it without any reservation. "Heaven knows," he concluded, "that there is no man in the House more than myself who would be glad to see the question of Ireland settled."

Thus in the midst of war, under pressure of a foreign Government and under threat of rebellion, the government of Ireland was again to be considered anew and put at the mercy of debate between embittered opposites. It was a calamity which, at least, could not be put at Carson's door.

## CHAPTER XXVII

### *Politics and Strategy*

Lord Northcliffe – Carson makes a stand – A universal genius – It can't be done –  
An impartial witness – Mr. Lloyd George pays a visit.

LIKE a watchdog, Sir Edward Carson kept growling at that time—Leave my sailors alone! Hands off the Admiralty! We have heard him warning the Prime Minister of a “calculated and concerted attack.” And so in the House of Commons, he demands that “such attacks on officers who are performing arduous, anxious and dangerous duties . . . ought to be levelled against the First Lord, who alone is in a position to reply to and deal with them.”

One of these critics was Lord Northcliffe, then at the height of his power. This big, round, smooth-faced man, with a touch of genius (and of megalomania), controlled many newspapers, and was himself uncontrollable. He had a great respect for Carson, possibly because, as he said, Carson's advocacy had “succeeded in robbing my poor little newspaper of nearly £300,000.” But Carson, who thought him dangerous, held him at arm's length, much to his aggravation. One day in the early part of 1917 the great journalist called to see the First Lord, after luncheon, at the Board of Admiralty. As Sir Edward did not appear, and Northcliffe was reported to be fuming in an empty room, Sir John Jellicoe went in to soothe him down, and, as he knew the object of the visit, took with him Commodore Paine, Chief of the Naval Air Service.

Northcliffe expressed himself with characteristic freedom on his grievance, which was that the German aeroplanes had attacked the Kentish coast and had dropped bombs uncomfortably near his house at Broadstairs. The Commodore, being a peppery man, retorted upon Northcliffe with even greater vigour—that the Naval Air Force was not to be deflected from its duties to the protection of the houses of private citizens in the

Isle of Thanet. Northcliffe, who evidently mistook Paine for Jellicoe, left in high dudgeon and, from that time on, the First Sea Lord had an increasingly hostile Press.

There were criticisms of a similar order in the House of Commons. Thus on the 1st May, 1917, we find Sir Henry Dalziel asking the First Lord to explain "why so many enemy attacks are possible on the Kent Coast, whilst British naval attacks are apparently impossible on Zeebrugge."

Carson replied that although the loss of life occasioned by these raids was most regrettable, the raids themselves possessed no military value, and added that the Vice-Admiral at Dover was giving them "continuous attention."

Dalziel went on to denounce the Vice-Admiral at Dover for describing German officers, "who had been continually killing women and children for the past year . . . as 'a brave and gallant enemy,'" and Carson replied that "with reference to the description of men who are dead, I would rather leave it to the feeling of the House."<sup>1</sup>

Carson in parrying these blows always appealed to the patience and magnanimity of the British public. Let them pay no attention, he advised them, to amateur strategists—"And for this reason, amateur strategists are always impatient, and are always ready for a gamble. I tell you, we cannot afford to gamble with our fleet."

"If the gamble fails," he continued, "it would be the end of your Empire, whereas if the Germans liked to gamble with their fleet, it would not even be the end of the war."

And again:

"No, so long as I am at the Admiralty, the sailors will have full scope. They will not be interfered with by me, and I will allow no one else to interfere with them."<sup>2</sup>

We may suspect that this note of defiance was not directed altogether against critics in the Press or in Parliament: there was someone else who itched to interfere—the Prime Minister.

There is one phrase especially which suggests the object of these remarks. "I do not imagine for a moment," said Carson,

<sup>1</sup> Parl. Deb., H. of C., 1917, vol. xciii., c. 222.

<sup>2</sup> At luncheon given to Sir Edward Carson, Aldwych Club, 8th March, 1917. Lord Northcliffe in the chair.

"that because I was supposed to be a cross-examiner, I can therefore in a few weeks become a strategist." Now we cannot read his *War Memoirs* without perceiving that Mr. Lloyd George imagined himself to be a strategist, and even were he more modest upon that theme we could still find evidence of these flattering presumptions in the work of his biographers. Thus Mr. Harold Spender describes how his hero, at the time of the South African Campaign, would "talk over every detail of the war. He would follow it out with the greatest persistence on large-scale maps. He developed the most uncanny military skill, and he would prophesy with the most remarkable astuteness the next move of the Generals on either side. . . . Is it not possible," this biographer asks, "that if opportunity had offered, Mr. Lloyd George might have become the successful leader of armies?"<sup>1</sup>

"In fact," says Mr. Herbert Sidebotham, "Mr. Lloyd George had in him the makings of a greater soldier than anyone engaged on either side with the possible exception of Foch and Ludendorff. Born under other social conditions, he might well have been in the Army, and in that case the British Army would have thrown up another Marlborough."

He had only one fault—impatience—but then, as Mr. Sidebotham points out, so had Napoleon.<sup>2</sup>

These praises may be thought high; but in one respect they do their subject less than justice. Mr. Lloyd George was as great a master of naval as of military warfare: his universal genius solved all difficulties on the sea as on the land without regard to those physical obstacles which might have retarded lesser men.

His only difficulty lay in a certain lack of that convenient commodity, knowledge. Lord Chatham, with whom also he was compared by Mr. Sidebotham, was his superior at least in this respect—that Chatham had a familiar acquaintance not only with military science but with soldiers and sailors. Even at Eton—for the boy is father of the man—and certainly in Cobham's Horse—Pitt must have come to know many of the future officers whom later he was to choose for his expeditions. English

<sup>1</sup> Harold Spender, *The Prime Minister* (1920), pp. 121-2.

<sup>2</sup> See the *Atlantic Monthly*, Nov. 1919: "Mr. Lloyd George, an Appreciation," by Herbert Sidebotham.

Society in his time was like a military and naval club where the characters and capacities of rising men were familiarly known and shrewdly estimated. The talk in Pitt's circle ran much on military matters. "On all sides," says Basil Williams, "Pitt would have heard every siege and battle of these wars fought over anew by veterans who had triumphed at Blenheim or lain before Lisle, and countless suggestions from them for mending our strategy and improving our tactics." Moreover, little as might be expected of a Cornet of Horse, Pitt took his duties very seriously and, as he afterwards told Lord Shelburne, read every military book on which he could lay his hands.<sup>1</sup>

Mr. Lloyd George, on the other hand, suffered under the heaviest disability of a War Minister: he knew neither the Army nor the Navy, and confessed to his friends that owing to this lack of knowledge he was unable to put the right man in the place of the wrong. Thus the "flair" of which his friends justly boasted failed him the moment he tried to put an idea into execution.

Lord Riddell, a judicious admirer, admits that one of the failings of Mr. Lloyd George was that, because he was "not a man of detail," he "disregarded all difficulties in carrying out big projects," yet in action the detail may make the difference between what is difficult and what is impossible, between victory and defeat.

"It is usually easy in war," Sir William Robertson was wont to say, "to know what you would like to do. The difficulty is to decide what you can do. You must work plans out in detail to be able to judge their practicability."<sup>2</sup> This difference between action and ideas only appeared when the Prime Minister tried to translate ideas into action. He would break out into some magnificent conception, like the passage of the Julian Alps or the conquest of Palestine. The Field-Marshal, tired of explaining that lack of transport or a range of mountains made such strategic schemes impossible, would merely keep on repeating—"It can't be done, Mr. Prime Minister, it can't be done."

Baffled by this granitic front the Prime Minister turned to the simpler element of the sea, and wasted his eloquence in

<sup>1</sup> *The Life of William Pitt*, by Basil Williams, vol. i., pp. 40 *et seq.*

<sup>2</sup> Lord Riddell's *War Diary*, p. 269.

vain attempts to persuade Sir John Jellicoe to launch the Grand Fleet upon the fortified harbours of the enemy. The First Sea Lord explained that ships were unequal to forts, since forts were unsinkable, were concealed and were armed with artillery capable of greater elevation and therefore of superior range. Such arguments, belonging to the realm of detail, were treated impatiently as the scruples of a pusillanimous mind. The caution of knowledge opposed itself to the valour of ignorance. Jellicoe, as Mr. Winston Churchill put it, was the only man who could lose the war in a single day. "One of my difficulties during the year 1917," Jellicoe afterwards wrote, "was to make the Prime Minister realise the fact that the whole of the Allied cause was dependent upon the Grand Fleet, together with the Harwich and Dover Forces, being in a position to hold the surface command of the sea."

We see Mr. Lloyd George's contempt for such objections shining through the pages of his *War Memoirs*. Thus in one passage the Statesman derides the Commander-in-Chief for taking precautions against the submarine. "It is not too much to say that our Grand Fleet had a lively apprehension of this hidden terror. It would not put to sea from its boomed and steel-netted shelters without an adequate escort of destroyers. . . . No capital ship could leave its base without a patrolling and protecting escort of small craft of which it was considered that at least 100 were required. . . . If Britannia ruled the waves she did it with a shaky trident in the days before the submarine was overcome."<sup>1</sup>

Three armoured cruisers, the *Hogue*, the *Cressy* and the *Aboukir*, had put out to sea without this "patrolling and protecting escort of small craft," and their unhappy fate no doubt suggested this "lively apprehension" to our sailors. Moreover, some thirty of the hundred destroyers had been detached from the Grand Fleet for the Scandinavian Convoy and the protection of oil tankers and other merchant shipping off the coast of Ireland.<sup>2</sup> Was Jellicoe wrong in insisting upon at least this minimum of seventy destroyers for the Grand Fleet, or should

<sup>1</sup> *War Memoirs* of David Lloyd George, vol. iii., pp. 1184 *et seq.*

<sup>2</sup> "The Grand Fleet is supposed to have 115 Destroyers and Flotilla Leaders. Actually we have 68!!"—Beatty to Carson in letter of 29th March, 1917.

he have defied the universal practice and put boldly to sea without them? The German High Sea Fleet, certainly, never sailed without an adequate screen of destroyers. The battleship no less than the merchantman is by itself an easy mark for the submarine torpedo. Why should it be right to convoy the one and wrong to convoy the other?

Admiral Sims, who, as an American, may be called impartial, gives the expert's answer to all these questions: "Without this destroyer screen the British Grand Fleet might have been destroyed by the Germans; if the Grand Fleet had been destroyed the war would have ended in the defeat of the Allies; not to have maintained these destroyers would then have amounted simply . . . to making Germany a free gift of victory."

Mr. Lloyd George attacks the Commander-in-Chief for his decision not to take the Grand Fleet, if it could be avoided, south of the Dogger Bank, because of the risk of mines and submarines in the narrow seas. Was this "crouching nervousness," as he calls it, or was it not well-calculated prudence in that great game of chess which was being played between von Tirpitz and Jellicoe—in which one mistake might have cost us every piece on the board?

"No attempt," Mr. Lloyd George continues, "was ever made by our powerful Navy to turn its great guns on the submarine nests of Flanders. When I ventured to suggest such an idea it was turned down peremptorily."

Admiral Sims, as it happens, says that these same points were put to him by "several prominent Government officials." "I can give you fourteen reasons why it is impossible," the American replied. ". . . Those bases are protected by powerful 15- 11- and 8-inch guns. They are secreted behind hills or located in pits on the seashore, where no approaching vessel can see them. Moreover, those guns have a range of 40,000 yards; but the guns on no ships have a range of more than 30,000 yards; they are stationary whereas ours would be moving. For our ships to go up against such implacements would be like putting a blind prize-fighter up against an antagonist who can see and who has arms twice as long as his enemy's. We can send as many ships as we wish on such an expedition, and they will all be destroyed. The Germans would probably get them on the



first salvo, certainly on the second. There is nothing the Germans would so much like to have us try.”<sup>1</sup>

In these differences Carson stood staunchly behind his Sea Lords. He, too, realised all that hung upon the Grand Fleet. “To gamble with your fleet, if the gamble fails, would be the end of your Empire,” he kept on saying, “whereas if the Germans like to gamble with their fleet, it is not even the end of the war.”

There was, indeed, one question upon which the First Lord and the Prime Minister shared the same opinion, the convoy system; but with this difference, that, although they both saw its obvious advantages, Carson understood what Lloyd George failed to understand, that practical difficulties and the lack of means, and not any inherent obstinacy, made the expert lag behind the civilian in this matter.

That Lloyd George was pressing Carson on the subject is evident from a pencilled note, of the 26th April, 1917, from 10 Downing Street:

“MY DEAR FIRST LORD,—Since we met this morning I have received enclosed. There seems to me to be no doubt that it is vital to this country that we should settle this infernal question. Otherwise we might sink.

“Ever yours,

“D. LLOYD GEORGE.

“Please return letter.—D. L. G.”

The Prime Minister, debating the question in the War Cabinet, proposed that he himself should visit the Admiralty and see how matters stood. To this proposal Carson readily agreed, and the Prime Minister did visit the Admiralty on the 30th April.

By that time, however, the decision had actually been taken. Mr. Lloyd George offers the explanation that the mere “prospect of being overruled in their own sanctuary galvanised the Admiralty into a fresh inquisition,” that on re-examination they found that “the figures upon which they had based their strategy were ludicrous, and that therefore protection for a

<sup>1</sup> Rear-Admiral W. S. Sims, Commander of the American Naval Forces Operating in European Waters during the Great War, *The Victory at Sea*, pp. 24 *et seq.*

convoy system was within the compass of their resources," that in fact the mere rumour of his visit had changed the submarine policy of the Board.

Those figures of which Mr. Lloyd George makes so much had been furnished by the Board of Trade (at Mr. Churchill's request) to put the best face on shipping casualties, and had never been taken seriously in the Admiralty. Nor is it likely that Admiral Jellicoe, who had himself instituted the Scandinavian Convoy in the autumn of 1916, should have had any prejudice against the more general adoption of the system. But he would only move as he found the means to hand and saw his way clear; that the means happened to be found on which the decision was taken before the Prime Minister visited the Admiralty we shall see in our next chapter.

## CHAPTER XXVIII

### *Convoy*

Colonel Repington - Admiral Sims - Carson as witness - "Sack the lot!" - Precocious - In the canteen - "Carry on!" - Depth charges - The first convoy.

MR. LLOYD GEORGE in his account of the convoy system will allow no credit to the Board of Admiralty. "I urged," he says, "the First Lord, Sir Edward Carson, to insist on the convoy system being tried. Personally he favoured a trial being made; but told me he had no official support from any quarter in his Department. The experts were unanimously and stubbornly opposed to the experiment." And again—"As to Lord Carson, he was conscious of half-heartedness in his official associates. Their stubbornness wore him down by wearing him out. They were obstinate, slow and self-willed. Carson was not cut out for a mule-driver."<sup>1</sup>

That inveterate but not altogether accurate diarist, Colonel Repington, lends some support to this version of the story. On June 15th, 1917, he lunched at 5 Eaton Place, and reports among other things of Carson's conversation—"Now that the U.S. are with us it is easier to institute convoy. This is being done after all the experts had first opposed him, and to-day the first convoy came in with 20 ships, all of which arrived safely with food and munitions."<sup>2</sup>

As Repington himself reports elsewhere, the first convoy arrived in England on the 20th May, 1917, nearly a month earlier, and this, of course, does not take into account the Scandinavian convoy which had been instituted in the previous autumn. Nor does Colonel Repington say why the experts at first opposed Carson. We get a better light on the subject from our excellent American witness, Admiral Sims. On the 6th April, 1917, the United States declared war; by the 9th April, Admiral Sims was in England. Admiral Jellicoe disclosed to him

<sup>1</sup> *War Memoirs*, pp. 1150, 1170.

<sup>2</sup> Colonel Repington, *The First World War*, vol. i., pp. 579-80.

at once the seriousness of the position, and was strongly backed, as the American tells us, by Sir Edward Carson, Mr. Balfour and Lord Robert Cecil. "Their attitude to me," says Admiral Sims, "was very different from the attitude they were taking publicly. These men naturally would say nothing in the newspapers that would improve the enemy *moral*; but in explaining the situation to me they repeated practically everything that Jellicoe said."

Admiral Sims impressed these gloomy views on the American Ambassador, the Ambassador pitched an even deeper note in a despatch to the Secretary of State; on the 24th April the first squadron of American destroyers left Boston, and on the 4th May it arrived in Queenstown Harbour. These dates are important, and so is the opinion of Admiral Sims, who saw the advantages of the convoy system, but saw also the impossibility of adopting it without American aid. "The British Navy in 1917," he says, "did not possess destroyers enough both to guard the main fighting fleet and to protect its commerce from submarines. . . . The plain fact is that the destroyers, in the numbers which were required, did not exist."<sup>1</sup>

"On 30th April," Admiral Sims continues, "I received a message from Admiral Jellicoe requesting me to visit him at the Admiralty. When I arrived he said that the projected study of the convoy system had been made, and he handed me a copy of it. It had been decided to send one experimental convoy from Gibraltar. The Admiralty, he added, had not yet definitely decided that the convoy system should be adopted; but there was every intention of giving it a thorough and fair trial."

Here, then, we see the sequence of events. Up till April 1917 the destroyers for convoy work, according to Admiral Sims, did not exist; the first flotilla of American destroyers set out from Boston on the 24th April, and on the 30th April the Board had already decided upon a convoy from Gibraltar. It was, then, the approach of the American destroyers to Queenstown rather than the approach of Mr. Lloyd George to Whitehall that "galvanised" the Admiralty.

"That same evening," Admiral Sims continued, "I met Mr. Lloyd George, Sir Edward Carson and Lord Milner, and once

<sup>1</sup> Rear-Admiral W. S. Sims, *The Victory at Sea*, p. 27.

more discussed with them the whole convoy idea. I found the Prime Minister especially favourable to the plan, and, in fact, civilians in general were more kindly disposed towards the convoy than seamen, because they were less familiar with the nautical and shipping difficulties which it involved."

When the *War Memoirs* of Mr. Lloyd George were published, I had an interview with Lord Carson on the subject of the attack upon the Admiralty. Time plays strange tricks in the minds of men, and we should not lay too much weight on a recollection of what happened eighteen years before. Nevertheless it may be said that Carson's memory at eighty was still remarkably clear and accurate. He had worked—so he told his biographer—in complete harmony with Sir John Jellicoe and the other Sea Lords; he had understood the reason for their cautions and delays in the matter of convoys; they were due entirely, in his opinion, to the practical difficulties which had to be overcome.

And he went on to tell how the Prime Minister, impatient of difficulties, pressed him to make changes at the Admiralty. "Sack the lot!" was a favourite expression with Mr. Lloyd George, and he kept on saying, "Why don't you get fresh men with sea-experience?"

"I must be under a strange hallucination, Mr. Prime Minister," said Carson, "for I thought that Admiral Jellicoe had just come from the sea."

And when Lloyd George pressed the point further, Carson had a list made out of seventy officers at the Admiralty who had seen recent service on the sea, and this he took great pleasure in showing to the Prime Minister.

But it was hard to convince Mr. Lloyd George. He was, besides, obsessed with the idea that the opinions of junior officers were of more value than those of their seniors. "In this connection," says Jellicoe, "I recollect when present at a meeting of the War Cabinet in 1917, hearing the Chief of the General Staff inform the Cabinet of the views of Sir Douglas Haig on some military operation."

"I do not agree with the Commander-in-Chief," Mr. Lloyd George interrupted. "I have a letter here from a subaltern in the trenches which gives an entirely different opinion."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Earl Jellicoe, *The Submarine Peril*, p. 36.

And Carson used to tell a story of the same sort. "He would meet," said Carson, "some imaginative midshipman or sub-lieutenant from the Fleet who would set him going all over again. Once, at his request, I saw a junior officer, who, Mr. Lloyd George thought, was going to save the situation.

"Well I said I would gladly see the young gentleman, and he came to my room. I told him that as there was no one present but myself he could speak with complete freedom.

" 'Thank you, sir,' said the young officer, 'since you ask me to speak freely, let me say that I have no confidence in Admiral Jellicoe.'

"So we went over the First Sea Lord's record together," Carson continued with a chuckle, "and he could find no fault with it, and beyond that he had no practical suggestion to offer at all."

A day or two after this interview the Prime Minister asked the First Lord what he thought of the young officer. "I thought him rather a fool," said Carson.

"Well, I did not think so much of him in a second talk I had with him, as I did in the first," the Prime Minister admitted.<sup>1</sup>

Mr. Lloyd George, nevertheless, blames Carson for not seeking an opinion either outside the Navy or in the Service, and alleges—what Carson himself never realised—that "the perplexity he was in and the impotence in which he was preyed upon his health." "I have never," Mr. Lloyd George proceeds, "taken the view that the head of a Government Department is forbidden by any rule of honour or etiquette from sending for any person either inside or outside his office, whatever his rank, to seek enlightenment on any subject affecting his administration. If a Minister learns that any subordinate in his Department possesses exceptional knowledge or special aptitude on any question, it is essential he should establish direct contact with him."<sup>2</sup>

The Prime Minister, indeed, was accustomed to boast that he had his own sources of information from the Admiralty, and it was discovered that some of his Secretaries were in the habit of going down to the canteen in the Admiralty basement, where

<sup>1</sup> See *Morning Post*, 24th September, 1934, p. 11. Interview with Carson.

<sup>2</sup> *War Memoirs*, vol. iii., p. 1171.

the Second Division Clerks had their lunch, and gathering there for the delectation of their Chief information more surprising than authoritative of what went on upstairs. Little wonder if with such encouragement tittle-tattle grew until the First Lord issued an order that if officers were found to be gossiping about the affairs of the Admiralty he would take a serious view of their conduct.

Mr. Lloyd George charges Admiral Jellicoe with being despondent about the situation. Sir John's retort is that "it was necessary to be very outspoken to the War Cabinet on the subject of the submarine danger even at the risk of being accused of pessimistic views, for it was very difficult during the first half of 1917 to get the magnitude of the danger realised."<sup>1</sup>

There was, however, one cause which might have induced despondency in any officer—the treatment he received from the Prime Minister. The First Sea Lord being constrained to oppose his denials to the strategy of Mr. Lloyd George out of consideration for the safety of the country, the result of these differences was an almost intolerable hostility and suspicion. Carson stood uncompromisingly for the Admiralty in this quarrel. "If," he afterwards said, "I had done what Mr. Lloyd George asked me to do, the whole thing would have broken down.

"Mr. Lloyd George, indeed, was so rude to Admiral Jellicoe that the First Lord came to see me several times and pressed me to accept his resignation.

"As, he argued, the Prime Minister had no confidence in him, it would be better if the Government got someone in whom they trusted.

" 'My dear Admiral,' I said, 'who is your Ministerial Chief?' And he replied, 'Why, you, sir.'

" 'My dear Admiral,' I said, 'have you ever found that I lacked confidence in you?' And he was good enough to reply that there were the happiest relations between us.

" 'Then, my dear Admiral,' I said, 'let me say to you what I should say to the youngest officer in the Service—Carry on.' "<sup>2</sup>

In the light of these memories, the reader will be able to set his own value on these conflicting accounts of how the convoy

<sup>1</sup> *The Submarine Peril*, p. 118.

<sup>2</sup> *Morning Post*, Interview with Lord Carson, September 24th, 1934.

system was adopted. What is certain is that in convoy by destroyers equipped with depth charges lay an effective answer to the submarine. In guns the destroyer had an easy superiority, and the submarine's torpedoes passed harmlessly under her shallow keel. When the enemy sent his shaft at one of the convoyed ships, the destroyer, guided by the periscope or the more tell-tale track of the torpedo, raced to the approximate spot and dropped its depth-charges all round, a mode of attack so disturbing that the German Commanders soon found it prudent to give the convoys a wide berth. Thus the convoy system was discovered to be not only the best means of defence but the best means also of attack.

The work was taken in hand as the means were provided; ports of assembly were organised at Gibraltar, Sierra Leone, Dakar, Hampton Roads, New York, Halifax and Sydney (Cape Breton). Sailings every eight days were arranged from all these ports, excepting Gibraltar and Hampton Roads, from which sailings took place every four days.<sup>1</sup> On 20th May, 1917, the first convoy reached England from Gibraltar, without the loss of a ship.

In the first three months of "unrestricted" submarine attack, February–April 1917, the Germans sank no less than twelve hundred thousand tons of British shipping; if that rate had gone on we should have been starved out; but the convoys brought relief, and not only the convoys but those other measures which the Admiralty had also organised—the large supplies of depth charges, the improved hydrophones, the better mines, the patrol and aeroplane attack, the better armed merchantmen, all worked together to turn the stubborn tide of this strange, uncertain and difficult war.

<sup>1</sup> *German Submarine War*, Gibson and Prendergast, pp. 173 *et seq.*



## CHAPTER XXIX

### *From Board to War Cabinet*

Sir Eric Geddes – Shipping losses – Carson defiant – Passchendaele – Rumours – Tributes to the First Lord – Commander Kenworthy – Carson leaves the Admiralty.

ON the 14th May, 1917, in the House of Commons, Sir Edward Carson made a statement on the reorganisation of the Board of Admiralty, by that time complete. It had, as he explained, a twofold object—to free the First Sea Lord and the heads of the Naval Staff as far as possible from administrative work in order that they might concentrate on the naval conduct of the war, and to strengthen the shipbuilding and production departments of the Admiralty. In this latter connection there was one announcement which excited some surprise. Sir Eric Geddes was made an additional Member of the Board of Admiralty with the title of Controller and with the honorary and temporary rank of Vice-Admiral. It was intended, so Carson explained, to develop and utilise the whole of our shipbuilding resources and as far as possible to concentrate the organisation under one authority. Sir Eric Geddes had been chosen to that end.

An Edinburgh man, Geddes had gathered experience of railway administration in the United States, in India and in England. When war broke out he had been employed by Lord Kitchener and then by Mr. Lloyd George in the work of organising the supply of munitions; he had been put in administrative control of the Royal Ordnance Factories, and later was sent to France to take charge of the railway transport behind our Western Front. Admiral Sims describes him as “a man after Roosevelt’s heart—big, athletic, energetic, with a genius for reaching the kernel of a question and of getting things done.” On the other hand he had had no experience either of the Navy or of the Mercantile Marine. We find Mr. Lloyd George telling Riddell that “Geddes will double the output of mercantile

shipping," but Sir Joseph Maclay, who was Shipping Controller, thought "L. G. made a mistake in not appointing a ship-builder or someone who understands shipbuilding." This unusual appointment let loose the tongues of envious critics. "Is there so great a dearth of able men," Mr. Hogge<sup>1</sup> demanded to know, "that Sir Eric Geddes has to be chosen for every new post that is created?"; but Carson explained to the House that Geddes had fulfilled most important work in France in the most successful way and that as his services were available "we were thankful to have him."

Although the invisible corner of the submarine war had been turned there was as yet little sign of improvement. As late as the middle of 1917 the Shipping Controller, at the request of the Cabinet, made a forecast of the shipping situation at the end of the year. Basing his estimate on the losses in May, he calculated that beyond that date we should no longer be able to supply the needs of our population, our Allies and our overseas expeditions.<sup>2</sup> In the second quarter of 1917 the loss of British and foreign tonnage was no less than 2,286,984, and although in the third quarter a reduction in the losses began, the figures remained alarmingly high. It was not, indeed, until the second quarter of 1918 that the production of ships in the world was to overtake the losses. In the meanwhile the attacks on the Admiralty grew more clamorous and vindictive.

Sir Edward Carson was never the man to be intimidated, and there is a robust note of courage and even of contempt in his speeches at that time. Thus at a luncheon given in honour of the American Navy on the 17th May, 1917, we find him saying: "I am so constituted that I cannot get cold feet. I can divide my critics into various categories. There are my political critics. I despise them in the middle of war. Then there are the critics who have been disappointed in the past. Whenever you read criticisms of my colleague Sir John Jellicoe try to find out what is the origin of them. But after all it does not really matter. . . . Let them grumble and growl and let us get on with our work. . . . I can tell you this with all confidence, that I believe in the whole history of the British Navy there never was a time at

<sup>1</sup> James Myles Hogge, Liberal Member for East Edinburgh.

<sup>2</sup> Earl Jellicoe, *The Submarine Peril*, p. 94.

which our men displayed greater heroism and courage than they do at the present moment." As for the menace of the submarine, it was "great, novel and terrible"; but "don't imagine that you will solve it by abuse or by funk." Let them have faith and "stick it out"; he had no shadow of doubt in the final victory.

Carson did, indeed, confess to anxious days and nights: the submarine was not his only anxiety in those dark days of 1917. The Russian Armies at that time were falling into their final disintegration; the collapse liberated large German forces for the Western Front. In the early part of 1917 Mr. Lloyd George had been so dazzled by the optimism of General Nivelle that without consulting either Sir William Robertson or Sir Douglas Haig he had agreed to place the British troops under that General's command. Nivelle's offensive failed; the French Army was proportionately depressed, and in part disaffected. If the Germans had chosen the right moment they might have won decisive victory and to prevent it Sir Douglas Haig undertook to maintain heavy pressure on the Western Front.

There was another and more secret reason for Haig's attempts on Passchendaele. It had been decided to adopt the plans of Admiral Bacon for a landing in force on the Belgian coast near Westende so as to turn the German flank and take the submarine bases at Bruges, Zeebrugge and Ostend. For that purpose a Division of Sir Henry Rawlinson's Fourth Army was encamped between Dunkirk and Calais and a great fleet of monitors, pontoons and rafts were prepared in the Swin at the entrance to the Thames against the moment chosen for their transport to the point of attack. Secrecy was so important that even the War Cabinet was not, until a very late date, informed of the arrangements.

The moment never came; various causes delayed operations, and eventually the weather made the terrain more formidable than the enemy. Haig could not reach Roulers, at which point it had been thought safe to give the signal for the combined attack.

With these anxieties impending, the naval career of Sir Edward Carson came to a premature end. It is possible to trace through the newspapers of that time hints of the change for some months before it came. On the 2nd May, 1917, the Parliamentary

Correspondent of *The Times* refers to "renewed rumours of Sir Edward Carson's impending resignation circulated last night—probably by those political agencies which see in the German submarine a weapon for striking at the Government." "It may be as well therefore," the Correspondent proceeded, "to state with authority that no difference of opinion whatever has arisen between the First Lord and his colleagues in the Ministry either on naval policy or any other issue." There had been the visit of Mr. Lloyd George to the Admiralty on the 30th of April; but that had been undertaken with Sir Edward Carson's approbation, nor could there be any doubt of its "complete propriety."

If Sir Edward Carson desired to leave the Admiralty, which was likely enough, it would be for entirely different reasons. "He is being attacked at this moment from many sides and from various motives, and although no one is more hardened to criticism than himself he may conceivably feel that the work of the Navy is prejudiced by his own prominence in controversies with which the sailors are not concerned."

The Correspondent added that the sailors would probably disagree as "very few First Lords had succeeded so rapidly in winning the confidence and respect of the Navy." "Nevertheless," he went on, "it is quite certain that Sir Edward Carson, who has never coveted or clung to office, would gladly hand over the reins at any moment if he thought that by so doing he would strengthen the Government or facilitate the work of his naval colleagues. His resignation, so to speak, has always been at the Prime Minister's disposal."

These rumours gave rise to anxiety nowhere more than in the Navy itself. "In Sir Edward Carson," said Admiral of the Fleet Sir Hedworth Meux (speaking on the same date at Liverpool), "we have got what the Navy considers the right man. I hope you will not allow these attacks . . . to drive him out of office."

Such attacks may have had their influence on the mind of the Prime Minister; but other motives also moved him to the change. He had, as he tells us, extended his sources of information. Commander Kenworthy—of all people in the world!—was by that time his unofficial adviser. "I owe much to Commander Kenworthy," he confesses, "for making me acquainted at this

critical stage with the views of the younger officers of the Navy. I was introduced to Kenworthy through the good offices of the late Sir Herbert Lewis, who was then Parliamentary Secretary to the Board of Education. I met some of these junior officers, and I realised that there was a school of highly intelligent naval men who were very critical of the High Admirals and their methods."<sup>1</sup>

Mr. Lloyd George alleges that he passed on to the First Lord of the Admiralty "the information I derived from these young officers. But he found it impossible to overcome the solid and stolid resistance of his Board of Admirals. I decided therefore to put someone in charge who was accustomed to force his will upon his subordinates."<sup>2</sup>

Carson, in fact, although he may not have known it, stood between the Board and the superior views of Commander Kenworthy and his young friends.

It is as surprising to hear as difficult to believe that "a conversation I [Mr. Lloyd George] had with Sir Douglas Haig in the early summer of 1917 finally decided" the Prime Minister. "As to Sir Edward Carson," says Mr. Lloyd George, "I am afraid that Sir Douglas Haig had no opinion of his qualities as an administrator," and "thought he was distinctly out of place at the Admiralty." Sir Douglas Haig, had he been alive, would no doubt have been flattered to know that a Minister who misprised him on land should have so deferred to him at sea.

The man "accustomed to force his will upon his subordinates" was at hand in the person of Sir Eric Geddes; there were only the feelings of Sir Edward Carson to be considered. "Mr. Bonar Law," says Mr. Lloyd George, "agreed as to the desirability of effecting a change if it could be done without offending Sir Edward Carson. We had both a great regard for Carson and we were anxious not to give him any hurt. But as he knew that we had always been of opinion that he would have rendered greater service to his country in the War Cabinet than in any administrative office, we could honestly present to him the case for a transfer from Admiralty House to the Council Chamber on that ground. Nevertheless, although membership of the War

<sup>1</sup> *War Memoirs*, p. 1178. Commander Kenworthy is now Lord Strabolgi.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1175.

Directorate was a more exalted and powerful position, I am afraid he felt wounded by the change."<sup>1</sup>

Thus it happened that late one night of July 1917 Carson and his household were awakened by a messenger from Downing Street who bore a letter from the Prime Minister. It was couched in the most effusively flattering terms. Carson's sagacity and courage must be no longer dissipated nor his health impaired in the cares of administration; his undivided assistance and support were required in the "more exalted and powerful position of the War Directorate." The Prime Minister had therefore decided to appoint Sir Eric Geddes to succeed him at the Admiralty and begged Carson to take a seat in the War Cabinet.

It was an appeal to Carson's patriotism and sense of duty which the Prime Minister knew well how to make, and which Carson, whatever suspicions may have assailed his mind, was in no position to resist. He left the Board with a regret that was mutual, for he had come to know and love both Admiralty and Navy, and they reciprocated his regard.

*War Memoirs*, p. 1177.

## CHAPTER XXX

### *Carry On !*

Beatty's regret - Heligoland - Jellicoe protests - Sir Graham Greene - In praise of the Navy - Propaganda - The only foundation - Carson visits Haig.

SIR EDWARD CARSON, as we have already seen, got on well with the sailor, and his correspondence includes a packet of letters of regret at his departure from the Board of Admiralty. Of these the most interesting came from the Commander-in-Chief, the Grand Fleet.

“ Grand Fleet,  
“ 18.7.17.

“ MY DEAR FIRST LORD,—It was with very deep regret that I read in this morning's paper that you are severing your connection with the Navy. I shall not have the pleasure of receiving you again on board the *Queen Elizabeth* in your official capacity but I hope that from time to time you will be able to pay us a visit.

“ I feel that the more Members of the War Council keep in touch with the active side of the Service the better they will be able to gauge our capabilities for Offensive or Defensive purposes.

“ I am indeed fearful of the future as regards the Navy, naval strategy, naval operations, etc. Thanks to your efforts we have established the system of convoy, the mining policy and the active use of our submarines all of which will and are doing more to deal with the menace than anything else. When I saw the Prime Minister he was very keen we should bombard Heligoland. So am I but what sacrifices are we to go to to achieve a result which can only be justified by the effect it will have on the war? Who is going to hold it afterwards and what provision will be made to protect it? Some very large questions to which it is necessary to have complete answers. I gather from Commander-in-Chief, Rosyth, with whom the

Prime Minister and Churchill took tea that the advocate for this drastic action is Churchill. I would point out that if there is a reasonable chance of success now, there was a hundred-fold greater chance of success at the beginning of the war when he was First Lord.

"Of course in those days he was in a responsible position whereas to-day no responsibility is attached to him or his views. This undoubtedly would account for a change of views.

"In any case I asked the Prime Minister to let me have in writing all suggestions for a more aggressive policy by the Navy made by irresponsible people. They can then be tackled and if anything of value is in them or possible they will be very welcome.

"In great haste,

"Yours sincerely,

"DAVID BEATTY.

"That question of becoming a part of the Naval Staff must have been a dream."

Such letters help us to understand the reason why in his short tenure of the Board of Admiralty Carson had made himself both loved and trusted: it was because he stood staunchly for the Navy against political interference.

The Executive Committee of the Navy League, in a resolution of regret, quoted with approval his words almost of defiance—"So long as I am at the Admiralty the sailors will have full scope. They will not be interfered with by me and I will allow no one else to interfere with them." The Department, moreover, recognised in him two qualities, of decision and justice, which mark the Administrator. His surviving colleagues and principal officers, interviewed on the subject, unite in unanimous testimony to these qualities of Carson's. It is not, after all, surprising to hear that his keen mind, magnanimous character and vast experience of human affairs and the principles of law should have fitted him to rule a Department.

This expert and disinterested evidence may be set against one or two political opinions. Mr. Lloyd George says of him that he had "neither the natural gift nor the experience to make a good administrator. Even as a member of the Cabinet, he had the



natural defect ingrained by centuries of habit in the mind of his race—he was naturally opposed to every Government.” And Sir Austen Chamberlain confirms—and extends—this judgment: “Carson was a great disappointment in the three months which he sat in Asquith’s Cabinet. He is an Irish sentimentalist as Lloyd George is a Welsh one.”<sup>1</sup> It may be sufficient to say that the officials of the Admiralty and the Law Officers of the Crown formed a different opinion.

If Carson had been of a suspicious mind he might have found reason to doubt the flattering grounds given out for the reconstruction of the Government. The Prime Minister did not dare at the same stroke to remove Sir John Jellicoe; but made his hostility sufficiently clear at an interview with that officer, at which Sir Eric Geddes was also present.

“I want to introduce you to the First Lord,” said the Prime Minister.

“We already know each other,” Sir John replied, for Geddes had then been three months at the Admiralty.

“There must be some changes,” the Prime Minister went on. “Burney must go.” Now Sir Cecil Burney, who was then Second Sea Lord, had been in Command of the First Battle Squadron under Admiral Jellicoe, who had the highest opinion, as he told the Prime Minister, of Burney’s devotion and abilities, both in his sea service and at the Admiralty. Nevertheless, as the Prime Minister insisted, he could only bow to the decision.

“And Oliver,” the Prime Minister resumed, “must also go.”

“That,” said Jellicoe, “is an entirely different matter. Oliver is Chief of the War Staff; he has been at that work since the beginning; he has all the threads in his hands. If he were to go it would be disastrous, so if you insist I must reconsider my position.”

“What do you mean?” asked the Prime Minister.

“What I say,” replied Jellicoe.

“You will obey orders like any midshipman,” said the Prime Minister angrily.

“You don’t know what you are talking about,” Sir John Jellicoe retorted. “The Board is at an end by your action. Fresh letters patent are required, and I cannot be compelled

<sup>1</sup> Sir Austen Chamberlain, *Down the Years*, p. 121.

to join the new Board if I think the conditions dangerous to the Service." And he went on to point out that the Sea Lords, being civil appointments, came under no act of discipline.

The Prime Minister waived his demand, and Sir John Jellicoe took up his duties again with Sir Henry Oliver as before.

From all this it might be supposed that Sir Eric Geddes was advanced to be First Lord with the intention of displacing not only Carson but Jellicoe, and this view of the case finds some support in the Prime Minister's *War Memoirs*.

"So I made up my mind," says Mr. Lloyd George, "to effect a change at the top in the Admiralty. Obviously, unless I were present at the Admiralty every day to supervise every detail of administration, it would be impossible for me promptly to remove all hindrances and speed up action. I therefore contemplated a change in the First Lord, Lord Carson [*sic*], and the First Sea Lord, Admiral Jellicoe."<sup>1</sup>

It is not, however, to be presumed that Sir Eric Geddes was party to this design. There is, indeed, some conflict of evidence on this point in the *War Memoirs*. "Sir Eric Geddes," says Mr. Lloyd George, "stipulated that Jellicoe should not be immediately removed." But he himself throws some doubt on the word "immediately." "We had undertaken," he continues, "to give Geddes an opportunity to make up his own mind, and after six months' trial he had come to the same conclusion that we had previously reached."<sup>2</sup> It is obvious from these statements that, if Geddes did not intend, the Prime Minister intended to get rid of Sir John Jellicoe after a decent interval.

There was, however, another change upon which the Prime Minister insisted. A few days after Sir Edward Carson left the Board he had a call from Sir William Graham Greene, Permanent Secretary of the Admiralty since 1911.

"Will you be so good as to tell me," Graham Greene asked Carson, "if you left a minute behind you condemning my work?"

"Of course not," Carson replied, somewhat taken aback, for he knew Graham Greene as a devoted servant of the Board, who had worked for months on end until one or two in the morning under stress of war business.

<sup>1</sup> *War Memoirs*, p. 1170.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 1177, 1179.

"Well," said Graham Greene, "I am sure your successor has had no time to estimate my capacities, yet I find myself retired."

Sir Eric Geddes, when questioned on the subject, replied, "I know nothing about it. It is the Prime Minister's wish."

Fortunately Mr. Winston Churchill had had experience of this excellent official's capacities, and when he took that office appointed Graham Greene Secretary of the Ministry of Munitions. Shortly afterwards Carson, happening to meet Churchill in the Prime Minister's room, pointedly congratulated him on his knowledge of men.

"What do you mean?" asked Mr. Lloyd George.

"Well," replied Carson, "hasn't Churchill the wisdom to choose for a much bigger job the man you retired from the Admiralty?"

As a fact, then, Graham Greene was not "retired" from the Admiralty but transferred to the Ministry of Munitions. "I am very grateful to you and my other friends," he wrote to Carson, "that I do not go with the stigma of failure in this critical period of the war. It will always be a consolation to me to know that I have enjoyed the confidence of the Ministers with whom I have worked and to whom I was responsible."<sup>1</sup>

As for Jellicoe, he saw in the departure of Graham Greene presage of his own fate. "It will not be long before I too am retired," he said to the Secretary, in August 1917.

This passage suggests a certain strain in the relations between the two Ministers. Although the fact was disguised by his promotion to the War Cabinet, Carson himself had been dismissed. For himself he did not complain, although there is a hint of what he may have felt in the words he used to his good friends of Belfast. On the 21st of July, 1917, the very day that he ceased to be First Lord of the Admiralty, he was made a Burgess of that devoted city.

"One of our Sea Lords," he told them, "came to me the day before yesterday—he is a good bluff honest sailor—and he said, 'Sir, you have let us down badly.'"

<sup>1</sup> Letter from Sir W. Graham Greene to Sir Edward Carson, 6th August 1917.

"I said to him, 'I had nothing to do with it. I never wanted to leave the Admiralty. I am sorry to leave the Admiralty.'

"I had," Carson continued, "learnt to know and love our sailors and their work, and nobody could be associated with them, even for the short time that I was, without thinking to himself how little the nation knows of what the Admiralty is doing. But, my Lord Mayor, I was told I would be more useful to the State elsewhere. This is a time of war and every man must go where duty calls him."

Then he went on to praise the Navy and to answer the critics who ignorantly assailed it.

"Do the people who write those things," he demanded, "ever try to contemplate that the vast seas of the world, two hundred millions of square miles at least, are policed and ruled by the Navy of England?"

"Do people who write . . . ever picture to themselves the life—morning, noon and night under the sea, on the sea, over the sea—that every sailor who is serving leads?"

"Do they ever ask themselves why we are able to carry on during a war of this duration without almost any privations?"

"Do they realise that every morsel of food they eat they owe to the exertions, day and night, of the British Navy?"

"I can only say this and I say it with all my heart, that I have never come across in all my life, in any capacity in which I have found myself, more able, more courageous, more determined, and more loyal men than constitute His Majesty's Navy. . . . I here, publicly in the presence of as loyal an audience as could be found in any of His Majesty's dominions, I here publicly tender to the Navy one and all my heartfelt thanks for the assistance and confidence they gave me when I was First Lord."

If an undertone of anxiety may be detected in these passionate words, Carson had reason to fear for the Navy the enemies whom he himself despised. In October Sir Eric Geddes, possibly less seasoned to these assaults, spoke to him about the Press attacks which were still being levelled at Sir John Jellicoe, and asked Carson what he should do about it.

"Do," said Carson, "why stand by him and think no more about it!"

Mr. Lloyd George avows a regretful conviction that, despite all precautions of tact and delicacy, his removal from the Admiralty rankled in the mind of Carson. The truth was that Carson's magnanimity was proof against any wound to his self-esteem in the transaction; what he feared from it was an injury to the public service and to the conduct of the war. Nor was he alone in these apprehensions. Colonel Gretton, most shrewd and honest of men, spoke with characteristic bluntness on the subject. Why, he asked, had the First Lord left the Board? It had been put about that his counsels were required to reinforce the War Cabinet. He did not accept that explanation and asked for an assurance that the change did not "portend an era of amateur strategy forced on the Board of Admiralty from outside." That there was good reason for these apprehensions we have already seen in Sir David Beatty's letter to Carson, and although Mr. Bonar Law smoothly reassured the House, the suspicion remained.<sup>1</sup>

Less friendly critics pointed to inconsistencies in the official explanation. Mr. Hogge asked if the change did not mean that the Member for Dublin University had been a failure at the Board of Admiralty. If the Government had no confidence in his work at the Board, why were they making him a Member of the War Cabinet? As for that mysterious institution it was to consist of five members who were to go very early in the morning and sit down to the war as business men sit down to their letters in an office. . . . Mr. Hogge was called to order, but Mr. Pringle took up the ball. It was to be the smallest possible Cabinet—to consist entirely of the Prime Minister and Lord Milner and Lord Curzon and the Right Honourable gentleman the Member for Barnard Castle (Arthur Henderson), with the occasional presence of the Leader of the House (Mr. Bonar Law). But it had been increasing. The Minister for Pensions (Mr. Barnes) had become a Member, and "now the Right Honourable gentleman the Member for Dublin University has been added, somewhat involuntarily, to that distinguished body of supermen," which made seven. Here someone interjected the name of General Smuts, which made eight. "There," continued Mr. Pringle, "we have this body which in eight months has practically

<sup>1</sup> Parl. Deb., H. of C., vol. xcvi., cc. 1402-3 (24th July, 1917).

doubled itself. At the present rate of progress, if it lives, it will be swelled to the dimensions of the old Cabinet, whose trouble so largely arose from the numbers of its members."

There was point in this *badinage*, the more as a member without a portfolio has chiefly the illusion of influence over policy which is largely decided in the Departments. There came, indeed, to be a division of powers, and Carson found himself in charge of that strange growth of war activities known as "propaganda and information." "The work done hitherto by Colonel John Buchan's Department" (it was announced on the 17th September, 1917) "will in future be under Sir Edward Carson's control."

Carson, as he afterwards told the House, found that in many departments things had grown up piecemeal which stood in need of co-ordination. The Foreign Office, the War Office and the Admiralty all took their share in the work. There was by that time need for domestic as well as foreign propaganda. The busy tongues and pens of a small but active body of Pacifists were having their effect. "There is," Carson reported, "an organised system of misrepresentation . . . going on from day to day throughout the length and breadth of the land . . . where they find families afflicted by the sacrifices they have made . . . they do not hesitate to enter the houses of many very humble people, trying to influence them against the conduct of the war." Both to counteract such insidious work and to promote the War Loans, the leaders of the various Parties in the House had combined to form a "War Aims Committee." All these and other activities of a like order Carson set himself to co-ordinate and direct.<sup>1</sup>

In a letter of the 6th of September, 1917, which was widely published in the Press, Carson formulated the ideas of the War Cabinet on "the only Foundation of Peace." He rebuked "the very loose and mischievous talk"—that by a treaty with Germany peace could be secured—and the "platitudes about a League of Nations to Enforce Peace without considering the conditions essential to its success." With German armies in occupation of vast tracts of conquered territory, there could be no real peace. Even if Germany were to evacuate Belgium, it

<sup>1</sup> Parl. Deb., H. of C., cc. 811-5 (18th November 1917).

would be trumpeted as proof of German magnanimity: "the prestige of the House of Hohenzollern and of the Prussian military caste would suffer no diminution." The German armies would be confirmed in the belief that they were invincible and would renew the attempt upon the first convenient opportunity.

"Surely, therefore," Carson concluded, "our course is obvious. We must carry on until such a victory is gained as will remove all practical danger of war for the future; and any man who tries, whatever his motive may be, to distract the attention of the country from this goal of deliverance is the worst enemy of a real peace."<sup>1</sup>

These stern conclusions were if anything confirmed by a visit which Carson paid shortly afterwards to the Western Front as a guest of Sir Douglas Haig. The Commander-in-Chief, as he noted in his Diary, found Carson—"Quite a rest to deal with after Winston. He is convinced that the military experts must be given full power, not only to advise but to carry out their plans. He is all opposed to the meddling now practised by the Prime Minister and other politicians." It was in the latter part of September; an infantry attack on the Ypres sector was under artillery preparation. Carson saw the Messines and Vimy Ridges and went over the ground of the Battle of the Somme, in particular that well-stricken field where the Ulster Division had made its great attack on the 1st July, 1916. In that abomination of desolation, which had once been a rich plateau of wheat and rye, then "like a rough moor," covered with thistles and pocked with shell-holes, he renewed his vow to have no peace without victory. "No reparation," he said in vehement words which reflect the vehement feeling of those times, "can ever make good what Germany's crime against humanity has destroyed, but no one can witness the work of the Hun without vowing that the reparation shall be as complete as France and her Allies can exact from the despoiler."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *The Times*, September 7th, 1917.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, September 25th, 1917.

## CHAPTER XXXI

### *The Supreme War Council*

Unity of command – Tug-of-war – Sir Henry Wilson – Caporetto – Crocodile and goat – Sir William Robertson – Carson's motives – Fall of Jellicoe – Misunderstandings – Balfour to Carson.

CARSON'S speeches at that time are mainly occupied with their special occasions. On 24th October, 1917, he was at Portsmouth, pointing out that "with all the talk of peace in the Reichstag and all the flowing notes of peace from German emissaries everywhere, we have never heard to this date any offer of peace whatsoever," and promising that the Government would enter into no negotiations without the consent of the Dominions or behind the back of its Allies. At the Mansion House on 7th December, Carson was pledging the Government to exact terms for Roumania, then invaded. At the Royal Colonial Institute on 13th December he proposed an "economic offensive" and informed Germany that the longer she continued her career of war the less would be her share when peace was made of the raw materials of which the British Empire commanded the main supplies. In any case, he added, they would see to it that their own people and their allies were equipped before their enemies. Time has bleached the interest out of most of that fiery rhetoric of war; but there is one passage which bears more directly on our story. Both inside and outside the House, Carson took part in the keen and critical debate on the formation of the Supreme War Council at Versailles in November 1917.

Soldiers and statesmen were at that time ready to agree on the need for unity and concord in the conduct of the war, and in so far as the Supreme War Council was directed to that end, there need have been no trouble. The War Cabinet wanted what the General Staff would have accepted, unity of Ministerial Control with unity of military advice, and if the Governments had formed an Executive advised by the four Chiefs of the four General Staffs, the arrangement might have gone through



without dispute. The secret springs of the fierce and sudden controversy lay in the suspicion that this idea of a Supreme War Council covered an intrigue against Sir William Robertson and Sir Douglas Haig.

There had been hints of it in the Press for some time before. On the 2nd November, 1917, Colonel Repington noted in his Diary "the set being made at the General Staff by the *Manchester Guardian*, *Evening Standard*, and other papers, all the attacks obviously inspired from the same source, and no one doubts that Downing Street is this source." As the world was much later to learn from Sir William Robertson himself, the Prime Minister had long been interfering at every turn in the military conduct of the war, his fixed idea being that there was a "deadlock" on the Western Front, a deadlock not made by the straining bodies of equal antagonists but by the trenches in which they defended themselves. They were, indeed, like two equal teams in a tug-of-war, in which both sides had dug their heels deeply into the ground, and pulled and sweated without visible advantage either way; but it would have been none the less dangerous to have taken away part of one team in the belief that the position was fixed, since it was not the holes in the ground; but the stamina and weight of the athletes that must sooner or later pull one side or the other over the line.

The Englishman, after his nature, was ready to go on pulling until the other side cracked: the Welshman proposed to dodge round the corner. Lloyd George, after backing Nivelle's short cut against the advice of both Robertson and Haig, pressed for one campaign to penetrate the Julian Alps and another to capture Jerusalem. When the stubborn soldier kept on replying, "It can't be done, Mr. Prime Minister," Mr. Lloyd George insisted upon calling in a "second opinion," in the persons of Lord French and Sir Henry Wilson; but so far Robertson and Haig had contrived to hold their own in the argument.

Sir Henry Wilson was a soldier fertile of ideas and brilliant in exposition, and it was he who first proposed the Supreme War Council. Thus on August 23rd, 1917, he records in his Diary how he met Lloyd George and Philip Kerr (his secretary)<sup>1</sup>: "I first

<sup>1</sup> Afterwards Marquis of Lothian.

told him that I thought his plan of Johnnie [French] and me and another soldier to overhaul Robertson's work was a bad plan and unworkable and unfair to Robertson. I then disclosed my plan of three Prime Ministers and three soldiers, to be over all C.I.G.S.'s and to draw up plans for the whole theatre from Nieuport to Baghdad. . . . I made it clear it was not aimed at Robertson or Haig or anyone."

Lloyd George was "distinctly taken." "He was satisfied with Haig but dissatisfied with Robertson. . . . He is evidently inclined to stop Haig's offensive in another ten days because of our losses, which he says, we cannot stand." He ordered Wilson to see Bonar Law and Milner about it; Wilson saw them and Carson as well, and (according to Callwell) "they all three highly approved of his proposal." Sir Henry Wilson met Lloyd George in October over the Palestine scheme: "Lloyd George told me to see Carson as soon as possible and try and persuade him to agree to action in Palestine during the mud months. . . . Lloyd George said that Milner and Smuts were already persuaded to that view. Lloyd George wanted me to go down to Birchington to-morrow to see Carson, but I really thought this a little hot." Carson, these entries suggest, was against the Prime Minister's strategy.

Again, on October 16th, Wilson writes: "To-night Lloyd George, Johnnie [French] and I dined again at Johnnie's house. It became very clear to me to-night that Lloyd George means to get Robertson out and means to curb the powers of the C.-in-C. in the field. This is what I have been advising for two and a half years—not to getting Robertson out, but to forming a superior direction over all the C.G.S.'s and C.-in-C.'s."

Thus it would seem there was an intrigue afoot of which Carson and the War Cabinet were probably not, or ill, informed, to supersede or to "get out" Robertson. It would also appear that Wilson, sorely tempted, was yet troubled in his conscience. He could go over Robertson's head (he persuaded himself) without getting him out.

The disaster of Caporetto brought these matters to a head. The War Cabinet were agreed that unity there must be; the Prime Minister went to Rapallo with his plan in his pocket, and part of it was that Sir Henry Wilson should be the

"Technical Adviser" for the British Army. Sir Douglas Haig had been consulted a week before and had vigorously criticised the scheme; Sir William Robertson, who had not been consulted, as vigorously opposed it. If there was to be unity of control under a Supreme Council it was right that the British Army should be represented by the Chief of the Staff and not by an officer who had neither the authority to advise nor the responsibility to execute.

Here, indeed, was matter for crisis, and Mr. Asquith was not blind to its possibilities. On such an issue—political interference with the Army—he might hope to detach the Conservatives from the Government. Mr. Asquith was an astute and patient politician. For long he had waited, as a crocodile might wait in the shallows of the Nile, supine and motionless, while a nimble goat, gaining courage with immunity, gambolled nearer and nearer to the shore. Here at last was the chance: a formidable rush, a snap of jaws, and the goat, leaping yards in the air, escaped as by a miracle.

Mr. Asquith was judicious; Mr. Asquith was moderate; Mr. Asquith was damaging. It was felt that he had right and reason on his side: the crowded House seemed to lean to his arguments. Mr. Lloyd George had seldom been at a more perilous corner; but he rose—and at once—to the occasion. "He began slowly," observed Repington, who watched the scene, "and either answered or skilfully evaded A.'s questions. Then he stood up and began to lay about him, using every artifice of the demagogue and the play actor. He played on the whole gamut of human emotions, cajoling, threatening with fierce gestures, and rising to a great height of simulated passion. He was humorous too and the whole House rose to him and rocked with joy. What an Assembly!"

After this it was almost superfluous for Carson to intervene but he took his stand by the Prime Minister and gave weight and emphasis to the defence. The decision, he said, had been taken by a unanimous Cabinet, the Prime Minister had seen on his way to Italy our Generals and Chief of the Staff; he had with him General Smuts; he had met the Staffs of Italy and France, and had come to an agreement. Carson proceeded to put the case for a Supreme War Council, which would work out plans

not for one or other part but for the whole of the Front. There was no question here of hostility but of co-operation, and if there were divergence the Government could refer the matter back to its own Staff. As for the objection that Wilson was junior to Robertson, "I decline to believe for one moment that our great men in the Army are constituted with this jealous disposition, that they cannot shake hands together, meet together and give the best of their brains to the interest of their country."<sup>1</sup>

Next day at the Constitutional Club Carson denied with even more emphasis that the Cabinet had been "stampeded by a wild Prime Minister" into interfering with the soldier in the strategy of the war. "I know," he said, "of no advisers on military matters except the Imperial General Staff, who attend the meetings of the War Cabinet, and by these advisers I have always been and shall always be guided, as long as I am allowed to take a part in the consultations of His Majesty's Government. I have met in the course of my work as a member of His Majesty's Government three great men . . . Field Marshal Haig, Sir William Robertson and Sir John Jellicoe. They have my absolute confidence."

Possibly before, but probably after, he made this speech Carson received the following letter from Sir William Robertson:

*"Personal.*

*20th November, 1917.*

"MY DEAR SIR EDWARD,—With reference to the speech you made in the House on the 19th instant I enclose a Minute which has been addressed to me by General Maurice, and which he is anxious you should see.

"As regards my own share in the matter I may say that I knew nothing about the proposal to set up a Council until November 2nd, when our Ambassador at Rome received a telegram from the Foreign Office on the subject, and asking me to meet the Prime Minister at Paris before he left for Italy. This was not possible and I therefore met him at Rapallo on the 5th November. On the 6th November Hankey gave me a copy of the draft agreement which had been prepared in

<sup>1</sup> Parl. Deb., H. of C. (19th November, 1917).

Paris on the 4th, and on the 7th, when the question came before the Rapallo Conference, I was given a revised draft which had apparently been drawn up the previous evening by Ministers attending the Conference. According to the heading of this draft it had been 'approved by the British and French Governments.' When the matter came up for discussion at the Conference on the 7th I thought it best to withdraw and did so, because as the proposal had received the approval of the Government I was not in a position to say anything about it, and I did not approve of it. I do not claim that my opinion should have been asked. I merely say that it was not, and that I had no opportunity of expressing it until the draft had been approved by the Government, and then of course it would not have been proper for me to express it.

"This correspondence is sent to you solely for your personal information, and with no intention of raising the question afresh in any shape or form. There never has been any question as to the desirability of ensuring better co-ordination of effort, and there has been no objection on the part of the soldiers, so far as I know, as to the constitution of the Council itself. Certainly not on my part. The only question to which I have given attention is that of the status and duties of the Military Representative. This is a soldiers' question, and as it has been dealt with in an official communication to the Cabinet it is best that I should not refer to it here. I would merely say that no Prime Minister, and more especially not Mr. Lloyd George, would tolerate the position of deciding questions at the Supreme Council and then having those decisions overruled by the Home Government. This procedure would be impossible and impracticable, to say nothing of loss of time. Therefore we must, in practice, regard the Council as supreme, and its military advisers as supreme from a military point of view.

"Believe me,

"Yours very sincerely,

"W. N. ROBERTSON."

As for General Maurice's memorandum it supported the statements in Robertson's letter.

"Of course," Carson replied (on the 22nd) to Robertson, "I never meant to impute that you had agreed to the scheme as formulated. If I had I would have said so directly. The point I was making was that the Prime Minister acted deliberately all through. However, I sincerely hope a working arrangement can be developed, as any disorganisation of the country at this juncture would be disastrous."

Now Sir Edward Carson must have known from his own experience if not from this letter that there was an element of truth in the charges which he had so hotly denied. He himself, in a similar case, had stoutly defended the Board of Admiralty from political interference. He had once remained in the Cabinet room after a meeting and remonstrated with the Prime Minister on his rudeness to Sir Douglas Haig.

On another occasion Mr. Lloyd George, coming into the Cabinet room, opened out in bitter denunciation of Haig, Gough and Jellicoe in the presence of Sir William Robertson.

"What has been troubling you this morning, Mr. Prime Minister?" Carson asked in his disarming brogue.

"Something serious enough," Lloyd George snapped back at him, drawing from his pocket an article by Lovat Fraser in the *Daily Mail*. "Look what they are saying about them!"

Carson laughed, and scribbled on a piece of paper these doggerel rhymes which he passed on to Robertson:

P.M. (*loquitur*):

*I hate the optimistic news*

*Of Haig (I don't believe 'em);*

*I hate the pessimistic views*

*Of Jellicoe (Relieve him!)*

*Let Gough be sacked and Haig be damned;*

*On justice let the door be slammed;*

*Let gossip rule instead of law,*

*I'll run the services by jaw.*

Carson, then, was aware of the evil, and yet denied it. The vigour of his denial suggests one explanation. "It is a lie," he said. "I would not remain in the Cabinet for ten minutes if it were true." Such words conveyed a warning to the Prime Minister

and were no doubt calculated as a deterrent. They were so interpreted by those who watched the situation most closely.

Carson would have resigned, as he suggested; but he no doubt thought it a more practical course to support the soldier in the Cabinet and mitigate a mischief which he could not prevent. As a matter of fact, the majority of the War Cabinet could be rallied against the Prime Minister in such disputes. Thus on the 18th July, 1917, Robertson notes that he had the War Cabinet with him, and again, on the 21st, he wrote to Haig:

"We had a rough and tumble yesterday. The fact is that the Prime Minister is still very averse from your offensive and talks as if he is hoping to switch off to Italy within a day or two after you begin. . . . He is very keen on capturing Jerusalem, and this, of course, I also had to fight, and intend continuing to do so. Altogether I had one of the worst afternoons I have ever had; but find that, after all, I usually get more or less what I want." On October 5th he writes: "The matter was discussed in Cabinet, and as my suggestion was favoured by most of the members a compromise was made"; and again on October 12th: "I think the Prime Minister has found that he has not got the Cabinet with him after all."<sup>1</sup> If Robertson, with Carson's support, "usually got more or less what he wanted," there was good reason for Carson to suppose that he could best help Robertson by remaining in the Cabinet.

As to the particular case, Carson may well have calculated that a Supreme Council reinforced by three such soldiers as Foch, Cadorna and Wilson would form rather an obstacle than a means to the Prime Minister's interventions in strategy. He knew, besides, and trusted Sir Henry Wilson; that excellent soldier, he may have thought, would always, in the last resort, be on the side of the angels.

If Carson reassured himself, as we may suppose, with these practical considerations, he was destined to have a rude shock. It happened that at Christmas-time he was snowed-up at some wayside railway station and overheard two countrymen talking to each other by the fire in the waiting-room.

"Jellicoe has gone," said the one, and it is easy to imagine how Carson pricked up his ears.

<sup>1</sup> Sir William Robertson, *Soldiers and Statesmen*, vol. ii., pp. 248 *et seq.*

"What do you mean?" said the other.

"He has been turned out," said the first countryman.

"That is a very strange thing," said the other. "He is to be made a Peer."

"But," said the first, "I suppose if he was turned out, it is because he was not fit for the job. Why then should he be made a Peer?"

"I thought," said Carson afterwards, "there was a good deal of common sense in that way of discussing the way people are got rid of by promotion."<sup>1</sup>

Robertson, as well as Carson, must have felt the news as a shock—and a warning. "Robertson," Repington noted in his diary at the end of 1917, "says that Jellicoe has been dismissed for the same reason that he, R., soon would be. Jellicoe was a pessimist; but had always been right . . . was always pouring cold water on L. G.'s fervent imagination, and bringing him down to earth, and L. G. did not like it."

Robertson survived Jellicoe six weeks.

Carson, meantime, was indignant at the news of the fall of Jellicoe, both because of his admiration for the Admiral and because as a Member of the War Cabinet and as an ex-First Lord he felt that he had some title to be consulted. As a fact Sir Eric Geddes had touched on the subject with him and Mr. Balfour in the previous October; but Carson had forgotten the incident. There was another circumstance which made him the more angry. He heard from Jellicoe, who had it from one of the Sea Lords, that Geddes had spoken of him (and of Balfour) as being in favour of the change.

Carson wrote a sharp letter to Geddes on the subject; Geddes replied that he had been misreported, and the situation was complicated by the circumstance that several of the Sea Lords who had been colleagues of Jellicoe, asked for explanations.

Balfour, appealed to by Carson on the point of fact, poured oil on troubled waters. He had been twice consulted on the subject of Jellicoe by Geddes; but—

"On the merits of the case I offered no opinion. Nor was I really in a position to offer any opinion. I left the Admiralty almost immediately after appointing Jellicoe to succeed Jackson;

<sup>1</sup> Parl. Deb., H. of C., vol. ciii., c. 2026 (6th March, 1918).



and I have had no personal experience of his office work. . . . His organisation of the Grand Fleet in the difficult times at the beginning of the war was, I believe, a very great piece of work. Whether different tactics at the Battle of Jutland would have turned a successful action into an overwhelming victory I am not qualified to say. But undoubtedly Jellicoe's policy on that occasion at the critical moment whether right or wrong was not due to a hasty error of judgment, but was the result of long meditation on the conditions which govern modern fleet actions. This is proved by the despatch he wrote in November 1914, which received the approval both of Fisher and Winston.

"It may be that Jellicoe is now an over-tired man. He certainly has every right to be. No one has done harder work since the outbreak of war. It may be (as Geddes thinks) that he allows himself to be too much immersed in Office detail. It may be that he does not think the recent changes at the Admiralty an improvement, and that this produces difficulty and friction. You and Geddes are really far better judges of all these things than I am, for you have both worked with Jellicoe at the Admiralty, and I have not. It is certainly quite untrue to suggest that I advised, or suggested, either that the late First Sea Lord should go, or that the present First Sea Lord should be appointed. And if I rightly understand Geddes' letter to you, he does not mean to make any such assertion—although there is a phrase which might be interpreted as meaning that, in our opinion, the First Lord would be well-advised to make a change. Speaking for myself, I certainly never intended to convey any such advice."

As to the Press campaign, which Carson took to be the cause of the changes, Balfour said, "I carried away the impression that, if it had not been for a contemporaneous attack in the *Daily Mail*, Geddes would have asked Jellicoe to resign at an earlier date. But he was rightly unwilling to give the impression that he was moved to action by Press criticism."

After some sharp gusts, the storm blew over as suddenly as it had arisen. Four of the five Sea Lords and Admirals who thought of resigning in protest sent one of their number to consult Carson, and in particular to ask him if he had expressed the opinion that Sir John Jellicoe was not the best man for First Sea Lord. Carson gave them the assurance which they had expected:

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he had given no such opinion; he strongly disapproved of the change; but he added the advice to put duty before inclination and remain at their posts. The Sea Lords thereupon agreed to call it a misunderstanding and calm was restored to the Admiralty.

It was no doubt about this fortunate conclusion that Fred Oliver wrote to Carson (on the 6th January, 1918):

“ Good ! Blessed are the peace-makers ! More at this particular moment than ever before. I heard last night with joy that the Admiralty had settled down and give you thanks for it as a humble citizen.”

## CHAPTER XXXII

### *The Irish Convention*

Preliminaries – Carson's advice – Amnesty – Willy Redmond – Words of warning – The Bishop of Raphoe – Deadlock.

IN May 1917 Mr. Lloyd George had made his offer of an Irish Convention to settle by common consent how Ireland was to be governed. "The stupid English," said Carson ironically; "but the clever Irish!—when we get together *we* will solve it!" It seemed a fair offer. Let them come to "substantial agreement," the Prime Minister said, and he would put it through.

John Redmond, by that time in desperate straits, accepted the invitation promptly, not, however, without proposing conditions. We find Carson (on 5th May, 1917) writing to Mr. Lloyd George on the subject. If Redmond insisted upon certain fundamental principles, e.g. against partition, Carson did not think the Ulster Council would join the Convention. . . . "I shall have to confer with you as to whether I shall attend the meeting of the Council—a question of some difficulty."

When Redmond did attempt to lay down conditions Carson rose in the House of Commons from the side of the Prime Minister, and said that if the future of Ulster were to be a closed question there could be no Convention. And Mr. Bonar Law added that, "There could be no 'substantial agreement,' to which Ulster was not a party."

This preliminary out of the way, there remained the question: What Irishmen were to compose the Convention. On this point Redmond had received shrewd advice from his friend the Bishop of Ross. "The number of thoughtful, calm, clear-headed men," said Dr. Kelly, "is not large; but such men can travel from opposite poles and agree. Each twenty men you add more than doubles the danger of disagreement." But Redmond here as elsewhere was not his own master. John Dillon had worked himself into a rage at the attempt to "throw upon Ireland the

onus of finding a solution"; he suspected a "regular conspiracy" to pack the Convention with Unionists; he therefore refused to join it himself; but insisted upon packing it with Nationalist Chairmen of County Councils.<sup>1</sup>

The Bishop of Ross had advised a membership of fifty; anything beyond sixty or seventy members at the outside, he said, would make agreement impossible. It is curious to find Carson giving the same advice to Mr. Lloyd George as Dr. Kelly was giving to John Redmond.

"I should think," Carson wrote, on the 22nd May, 1917, "the members ought to be limited to about fifty or sixty—and that anything else would be unworkable."

In the course of his letter, he explained to the Prime Minister that in Ireland "in whatever capacity a man goes there he will go either as a Unionist or as representing one of the phases of the Nationalist Party," and he proceeded to analyse political opinion in Ireland—Ulster Unionists, Southern Unionists and at least four classes of Nationalists: "(1) Those who adhere to the Parliamentary Party; (2) Those like Murphy who go for Colonial independence; (3) Sinn Feiners; (4) Mr. O'Brien's section."

Then Carson pointed out that the County Councils, which had been elected some six years before, were not really representative, and he added a remark which might have given pause to the sanguine Prime Minister: "I think it pretty clear that if elections took place now, the Sinn Feiners would have a much increased representation in the County Councils."

James Craig, at the time Treasurer to His Majesty's Household, and T. P. O'Connor were asked to settle this thorny question of membership. They had decided after long deliberation to make the Convention a small body when a messenger arrived with a note for Mr. O'Connor; it was from Redmond, and stated his decision. If, he said, the Nationalists were to be a party to the Convention, it must include certain Roman Catholic prelates, Chairmen of County Councils and other representatives of public bodies. Dillon had had his way, and the Convention was to start overloaded with disputatious Irishmen.

The Chairmanship was a difficult point. The Prime Minister wanted General Smuts and sent Craig to broach the proposal to

<sup>1</sup> Denis Gwynn, *Life of John Redmond*, p. 558.

that distinguished South African at Savoy Court. Smuts seemed inclined to accept; but Craig, who knew his Ireland, tactfully pointed out to him that it would be better to take the next Union Castle steamer for the Cape, and for two reasons: that without an interpreter he would not understand what they were saying and that without a guide to their religious differences he would not understand what they were doing. Mr. Lloyd George then proposed Sir Horace Plunkett, a high-minded gentleman of ancient family, who dreamed of an Ireland reconciled and redeemed by co-operative societies. Craig expressed his fear that Plunkett would never help anyone to reach any conclusion; but the Prime Minister put these objections down to the bigotry of an Ulsterman, and Plunkett was appointed.

It remained to induce Ulster to go into the Convention, and as the Ulstermen trusted Carson, and did not trust most of his colleagues, it came in the end to Carson himself going over to Belfast to persuade them.

Thus it happened that on the 8th June, 1917, Carson met the Ulster Unionist Council in the Ulster Minor Hall and carefully and patiently went with them through all the mazes of their perplexing situation. "Don't bother about my position in the Government," he said, "don't trouble yourselves about that. It is nothing to me . . . whether you decide in accordance with my view, or whether you decide against my view, I go with you to the end."

They might choose to rely on the pledges of two Prime Ministers; but there were men in Ireland who made England's difficulty their opportunity. Hence the invitation. And he was authorised by Mr. Lloyd George, whom he had seen the day before, to say:

"(1) That unless the Ulster Unionists agree with the proposals at the Convention nothing could come of it.

"(2) That their position was not to be prejudiced by going into the Convention.

"(8) That he adhered to the statement that there should be no coercion of Ulster."

All this was reassuring. On the other hand if they refused the invitation, men would say, "O there, it is those unreasonable

Ulstermen." He would advise them therefore to make no condition, but to enter the Convention, and sit very tight: "Let every man have his fling; let them all go for one another. Let the Republicans propose a Republic and let those who masqueraded as Constitutionalists either oppose or go with them. Then we shall know where we are."

As for themselves, they might suggest "the Union that was passed by William Pitt" as their contribution—"show us where we are to be better off, have greater liberty and more freedom of conscience and the men of Ulster will join with you in improving the Act of Union."

If they refused let them propose to exclude the whole of Ulster or make any other proposal, and consider it: "I am bound to say that assuming a settlement can be come to which preserves to Ulster her rights, I would be glad to see the question settled."

Thus fortified the Ulstermen went warily into the Convention; but the Sinn Féin Party were deaf to all blandishments. They stood outside. Moreover, on the 15th June, 1917, Mr. Bonar Law announced a general amnesty for all rebels "in order that the Convention may meet in an atmosphere of harmony and goodwill." The prisoners, ringleaders and gunmen of Easter Week, swarmed out like a hive of angry bees. On the very day of their release they petitioned the President and Congress of the United States in the name of "the provisional Government of the Irish Republic"; a hundred of them marched through Dublin under Republican banners and in Cork they improved the occasion by wrecking the gaol.

That Carson disapproved we gather from the following letter from the Colonial Office, dated 26th June, 1917:

"MY DEAR NED,—. . . I entirely share your views and think you should raise the whole question in the Cabinet. Of course I will back you for all I am worth. The madness of releasing these rebels! It has led, as you and I foresaw it would, to these lamentable scenes. Duke is obsessed! Surely they won't make him Chairman? I vote for an Irishman.

"Yours,

"WALTER LONG."

About that time—on the 7th June, 1917—the Irish Division and the Ulster Division stormed the Messines Ridge side by side. John Redmond's brother, Major Willy Redmond, who had appealed to the House of Commons "as one about to die" three months before, was rushing forward on the right of his battalion when he was struck by two bullets and was carried by stretcher-bearers of the Ulsters to the convent of Locre where a few hours later he died. "I have known him," said Carson in the House of Commons, "for more years than I can calculate and I have never had with him one bitter word either in public or in private life." And he went on to say that an Ulsterman had been the first Member of the House to make the same supreme sacrifice as Willy Redmond had also made for their country. "Let us put the facts together. It is not necessary to dwell upon them. They are eloquent."<sup>1</sup>

Unfortunately these fine loyalties of war seemed to make but little difference to the age-old animosities of the Irish race. An officer of the Royal Irish Rifles ruefully reported to Carson that the Ulstermen and the 16th (Irish) Division were "friendly enough when they were going over the top together but it's when they are behind the lines that they are apt to scrap a bit. . . . After the 'show' the Ulstermen went about playing *Dolly's Brae* and *Derry Walls* and other aggressively Orange ditties, which didn't exactly please the 16th." He was forced to think that their being thrown together would not make the slightest difference in the long run.

It certainly made no difference in East Clare, where the rebel Eamon de Valera fought and won the seat from which Willy Redmond had fallen, boasting that he would make "English law" impossible and that "if Ulster stood in the way of Irish freedom Ulster would have to be coerced." On the 18th July, 1917, the leadership of the National Volunteers, which John Redmond had assumed at the beginning of the war, passed into Sinn Féin hands. The rebels were taking charge.<sup>2</sup>

Carson received letters from Ireland warning him that owing to the weakness of the Chief Secretary things were sloping steeply down to another rebellion. The police reports were alarming the

<sup>1</sup> Parl. Deb., H. of C., vol. xciv., c. 619 (11th June, 1917).

<sup>2</sup> Professor Alison Philips, *The Revolution in Ireland*, p. 126.

judges at the assizes: if they kept quiet it was for the sake of the Convention. Every friend of the British Government, every loyal magistrate and policeman, was utterly disheartened. "Birrell," said an Irish wit of that time, "was a Cromwell compared with Duke."

On the 25th July, 1917, the Convention met to discuss and settle the future Government of Ireland—as if a ship's captain were to call a conference of passengers and crew to discuss the principles of navigation in the centre of a cyclone.

Carson was well informed of the proceedings by Hugh Barrie, Chairman of the Ulster delegates, and Sir Alexander McDowell.

"The move which is being made at present," McDowell wrote on the 9th August, 1917, "is to tempt the Ulstermen to agree to a separate Parliament, the Irish getting free of all responsibility for the War Debt. Martin Murphy is in this move; but those principally canvassing it are the Roman Catholic Bishops. All the Ulstermen have refused to listen to it and look upon it as a most dishonest proposal." "Plunkett," he added, "is all over the shop, harmless so far but not helpful to expedition, of course without having any wrong intention."

"One curious development," Barrie wrote (on 12th August, 1917), "is that Redmond himself is not acting on the Standing Committee and the Nationalists, although responsible for the Convention, have declared, through Devlin, that they do not intend to submit any scheme of settlement themselves!

"On 21st W. M. Murphy leads off with his scheme for Colonial Home Rule. In private conversation he is delightfully ignorant as to what it really means. He confesses that his sole object in recent years has been to wreck the Nationalist Party, and he is proud of his success in that direction."

Carson had proposed to the Prime Minister that the Convention would stand a better chance of success if it did not confine its sittings to Dublin; but paid visits to Cork and Belfast, and the Convention was on the point of going to Belfast when he received Barrie's letter. "I am sure," Carson replied, "the members of the Convention will be cordially welcomed by the Belfast people, who are renowned for their hospitality, and I need hardly say that the Convention has my best wishes for the successful issue of its labours."



Sir Alexander McDowell wrote again to Carson on the 15th September:

"The Convention is still continuing the discussion of schemes that have been sent in; but none of these schemes present any prospect whatever of a settlement. Everything, however, in the Convention has been of the most harmonious nature and the best of good feeling exists among the different parties. The visit to Belfast has done a world of good; it has contradicted in the clearest possible terms a great number of the lies that have been circulated about Belfast, and the allegations about sweating, and the Roman Catholic Ecclesiastics from the South who came up and went through the shipyards and factories were amazed at what they saw."

It may be thought curious that this Convention of Irishmen did not think it worth while even to discuss the scheme of self-government contained in the statute of 1914. They roamed at large over many principles of government and as they could agree upon none, they thought it advisable to refer to Committee a draft scheme prepared by the Roman Catholic Bishop of Raphoe. The larger questions of principle were left in suspense while the Committee sought to come to agreement upon questions of detail, this agreement on detail being conditional upon general agreement upon the whole scheme. "It was," as one of them observed, "pretty much like saying we are agreed that if there is to be a policeman there should be buttons on his uniform, although we are not agreed that there should be a policeman at all."

Now that clever and charming ecclesiastic, Dr. O'Donnell, Bishop of Raphoe, had drafted a scheme which might have been devised to make agreement impossible. There were some who thought that such was his purpose, and that the Roman Catholic Church would have greatly preferred Ireland to remain in the Union, so that she could enjoy the support of eighty or so faithful children of the Church in the British Parliament. Plunkett, on the other hand, in a letter to Redmond, said that the Bishop's tactics were "to put the Nationalists in a strong position in the country by getting them to come out for fiscal autonomy. He then thinks that the Government will step in and sweep away all Unionist resistance."<sup>1</sup> Whatever his purpose, the Bishop's

<sup>1</sup> Denis Gwynn, *Life of John Redmond*, p. 374.

scheme went far beyond the Act of 1914, giving to Ireland all the powers of a Dominion including the right to control the Customs and Excise.

The Ulstermen can hardly be called fanatical for rejecting a proposal which struck at the very root of their livelihood. Mr. H. M. Pollock, President of the Belfast Chamber of Commerce, one of the ablest business heads in the North, patiently explained how that great port drove a trade with the whole world and depended on markets 90 per cent of which were outside Ireland altogether. How then could Ulster agree to be ringed round by Customs barriers extending no farther than the pelting farm of Ireland?

There were other solid reasons why Ulster obstinately opposed her policy of exclusion to this policy of an all-Irish system. The only industrial community in Ireland, her trades unions had their headquarters in Great Britain: if shipbuilding were slack in Belfast it might be busy on the Clyde and the Mersey, or *vice versa*. Uniformity of laws and conditions and free movement of workmen were necessary to her industrial life.

These arguments made no appeal to the priests and peasants of the South. Moreover, the Bishop of Raphoe counted upon the support of the Southern Unionist delegates, at that time led by Lord Midleton. The Bishop, in fact, over-reached himself. Lord Midleton and his group had gone over to Home Rule for all Ireland; they were ready to side with the Nationalists against Ulster on the issue of exclusion; but they could not agree to the control of the fiscal system which they saw meant financial and therefore political independence.

On the 14th November, 1917, Mr. Barrie and Lord Londonderry, the Chairman and the Secretary of the Ulster representatives, wrote a letter to Sir Horace Plunkett describing a position of deadlock, not on detail only but on principle: "We hold that in matters of fiscal policy and economic life the interests of Ireland are inseparable from those of Great Britain."

It had been made clear to them that one object in view was "to escape from all liability for National Debt and from bearing any share in the cost of the war or of national defence in the future. . . ." Moreover, Irish fiscal autonomy "must inevitably

lead to the same goal as the Sinn Feiners desire to reach under a republic."

And they pointed out how fatal it would be to Ireland, "with practically no raw material within herself, to be cut adrift from the strongest commercial power in the world and to have to rely on her own resources in the welter of economic trouble with which the world will be surrounded at the conclusion of the war."

These were vital differences: "We are satisfied that for Ireland and for Great Britain a common system of finance with one Exchequer is a fundamental essential, and that Irish industrial and commercial interests and the development of our resources can be best furthered in full community with the economic life of the great industrial people with whom we have so much in common and from whom we refuse to be divorced."

The Convention had in fact broken into three pieces and was already beyond repair.

## CHAPTER XXXIII

### *Carson Resigns*

At the luncheon table – Conscription in Ireland – The ordeal of John Redmond – Lloyd George and the Ulstermen – The archbishop's letter – Pressure on Carson – Redmond beaten – Carson resigns.

IRELAND in that dark winter of 1917–18 encroached more and more upon Carson's daily life. Once at least it took on something of its old humour, as when Lady Carson invited Mr. Lloyd George and Mr. Winston Churchill to luncheon one day in the autumn. Mr. Churchill, with less than his usual tact, opened a conversation on his disastrous visit to Belfast in those turbulent times before the war. He never dreamed, he said, that his life was in danger, or of course he would not have taken his wife.

"He enlarged on this [Mrs. Spender reports] until Ruby [Lady Carson] could bear it no longer. 'You mean to say,' she said, 'you didn't know your life would be in danger if you went to Belfast then?'

"'No, indeed, I didn't,' said he.

"'Well,' said Ruby, 'for my part I think it was *extremely* forbearing of the Ulster people *not* to kill you. I think they had great provocation.'

"Then she turned to Mr. Lloyd George, 'Don't you think it was very forbearing of the Ulster people not to kill Mr. Churchill?'

"'Yes,' said Lloyd George, 'I do.'

"Mr. Churchill buried his nose in his plate; Sir Edward looked on with a grin, and Ruby, being thoroughly wound up, went on, 'The Ulster folk are the most splendid people in the world, aren't they Mr. Lloyd George?'

"'Yes,' said he, 'they are.'

"'And they're *never* to be coerced, are they?'

"'Never,' said Mr. Lloyd George. 'I always maintain that,' he continued, 'and I am not saying this to curry favour—it's a

fact that before war broke out, I made a speech to that effect in the Cabinet.'

"Then Ruby was satisfied, and the situation became normal."

But there were more serious aspects of the eternal question. At the beginning of December the Government gave way to the Nationalists on the issue of Redistribution in Ireland and Carson was on the point of resignation. "Although we feel very keenly," Hugh Barrie wrote to him on the 7th, "the action of the Government this morning in suddenly yielding to Nationalist pressure and leaving Irish Redistribution over to a separate Bill we think it right to say that we feel we are correctly voicing Ulster Unionist opinion when we most earnestly urge that you should continue in the Government."

The time might come when there would be no alternative, Barrie advised, but not yet. . . .

It nearly came a few days later, when the Cabinet debated Conscription for Ireland, and Carson stood strongly for it—but alone. "Sir Edward gets sicker and sicker," Mrs. Spender wrote on the 18th December, "at the Cabinet's refusal to face the music over Conscription for Ireland. He makes his views perfectly plain, and when they ask his help and opinion on plans for raising more men in Great Britain, he refuses point-blank and takes no part in the discussion."

Carson was usually ready to face the music, and yet he must have been haunted with doubts, if he bore in mind some of his Irish letters. An old schoolfellow, with an experience as Resident Magistrate of thirty years, had written to him (a year before):

"I remember in 1892 at Gweedore (Co. Donegal) the Police Sessions Clerk reporting to me that it would take 300 police to 'lift' a fine of 2s. 6d. which I had imposed on a local 'leader' *qua* an unlicensed dog, and you who remember Michelstown, etc., can imagine what force would be required to take 2,000 hostile conscripts out of the following counties, viz. Cork, Donegal, Kerry, Limerick, Mayo, Galway, etc., etc."

And through it all the Convention brooded—like a hen on eggs long addled. The situation was difficult for Carson but it was worse for his old adversary.

John Redmond was in a desperate case, his health failing, his power gone. When he walked out into the street from Trinity

College after the first sitting of the Convention, he was mobbed by a gang of Sinn Fein roughs and pelted with tomatoes and rotten eggs, yet he kept on his way without moving a muscle of his face. In his youth he had seen Parnell meet the same sort of missiles with the same sort of courage, the customary fate of those who aspire to lead that romantic people. Nevertheless he must have felt that for him the sun had set.

For Redmond, indeed, there was only one hope—the Convention: for that he worked with all his dying strength. On the 31st November, 1917, when the Ulstermen had already made their stand against the Bishop of Raphoe, Redmond wrote urgently to the Prime Minister: “. . . unless the Government and Carson and perhaps even higher influences intervene to induce the Ulstermen to come to an agreement, the Convention will be abortive. . . . It will mean governing Ireland at the point of the bayonet. . . . Sinn Fein will be omnipotent. . . . The Nationalist Party will be helpless and will inevitably disappear. . . .” The scandal of it would echo round the world, “especially in America.”

In this crisis Redmond thought chiefly of his old antagonist: “You and Carson and the Government,” he said, “have it in your power” (to make the Convention a success). “You should speak quite plainly to these Ulstermen, and Carson ought to come over to Ulster, as he did in 1916.”

And again:

“There is not a moment to lose in this matter . . . before Christmas you will probably have bloodshed and violence all over the country.”

Mr. Lloyd George had been “immersed in very great and probably far-reaching events.” “Nevertheless,” he replied, “I have already had a long talk with Carson; he fully realises the importance of getting agreement if possible. He cannot persuade his people to go to the length of the proposals put forward by the Nationalists; but I have asked him to use his best endeavour to find out some compromise which would represent a substantial advance on the part of his friends. He has promised to do his best.”

Redmond wrote on the 19th November to repeat his urgencies: “I wish again to say that . . . it is up to you and the Government

and, in a special way, up to Carson, to step in and avert the serious disaster to the Empire of a break-down of the Convention."<sup>1</sup>

In response to these appeals the Prime Minister wrote the following letter to the Chairman of the Ulster Delegation.

" 10, Downing Street,

" 23rd November, 1917.

" DEAR MR. BARRIE,—I have heard of the difficulties which the Irish Convention is experiencing in finding a settlement, and of the danger which there is of a breakdown. It would in my opinion be a disaster if this were to happen. From the point of view of the war and of our international position—particularly our relations with the United States—it is most important that every effort should be made to arrive at a settlement.

" I have to go abroad early next week to a very important Inter-Ally Conference; but as soon as I return I should like to have an opportunity of discussing the situation with you, Lord Londonderry, Sir Alexander McDowell and Mr. Pollock.

" Ever sincerely,

" D. LLOYD GEORGE."

The interview, between the Prime Minister on the one side, and Barrie, Pollock and Londonderry on the other—McDowell being by that time too ill to attend—took place on the 6th December, 1917. Mr. Lloyd George could not shake the Ulstermen. A differential rate of Customs and Excise, they argued, would make free trade between the two countries impossible. Moreover Ulster had no desire to be delivered from her obligations to contribute to the cost of the war, of Defence and of the Imperial Services. They saw clearly and they stated plainly that the Nationalist design would involve not only the ruin of their industrial North; but the separation of Ireland from the British Empire. In short the draft scheme of the Bishop of Raphoe was so extreme that they could only conclude that the Roman Catholic Church was using it to wreck the Convention, an observation with which Mr. Lloyd George expressed his vigorous agreement.

<sup>1</sup> Denis Gwynn, *Life of John Redmond*, p. 570 *et seq.*

The Prime Minister, however, was by no means defeated. He was interviewing at the same time both the Southern Unionists and the Irish Nationalists. How some of the former regarded the situation is shown in a letter of the 7th December, 1917, which Dr. Bernard, Archbishop of Dublin, wrote to Sir Edward Carson.

"I came over to London on Tuesday night, being summoned to see the Prime Minister about our Irish problems; and am going back to-night.

"I should greatly have liked to see you, but I know how busy you are with the gigantic problems of the war pressing for solution. And then—too—I was a little afraid of causing you embarrassment by asking you to talk about the Convention.

"However I want you to know how the position strikes me:

"(1) As you know, the leaders of all Parties in the Convention have agreed provisionally to certain proposals for a Dublin Parliament. But the agreement on the part of the Ulster representatives is only provisional. That is, they agree that if a Parliament is to be set up it must be constituted in a particular fashion and so forth.

"(2) A definite line of cleavage has now appeared. The Nationalists claim for a Dublin Parliament full fiscal autonomy, i.e. complete control of Customs, and power of making commercial treaties. All the Unionists—North and South alike—refuse to make any such concession.

"But

"(3) The Southern Unionists have now put forward certain positive proposals which confer very considerable powers on the Irish Parliament but do not concede Customs, Imperial interests being safeguarded.

"The Prime Minister seemed to view these proposals with favour, and my own belief is that the Nationalists would accept them, if the Ulstermen could agree. But so far Ulster has definitely agreed to nothing.

"Now it is quite possible that when the Convention meets, Ulster may find herself isolated and alone. That might be quite defensible, if she had any positive policy to put forward. But if she is placed in the position, after all these months of Conference, of saying 'No' to everything, she will be judged severely by





CLEVE COURT, MINSTER-IN-THANET

the public. So at least I think. But she will get no mercy from future Parliaments if she breaks up the Convention now by saying '*Non possumus*.'

"She will not get partition. That policy is dead. But she could get administrative security if she asked for it.

"I am sure you know all this already, and that you have seen all the relevant documents. But I relieve my mind by setting down a few points in this way. I am very apprehensive as to the fate of Loyalists, North and South, in the future if the Convention breaks. We shall never get such terms again as we could get now."

What Carson replied to this letter we do not know, nor if he realised what was going forward between the Prime Minister and the Irish Nationalists. "I have been thinking," Mr. Redmond wrote to Mr. Lloyd George, on the 11th December, 1917, "over the conversation which Mr. Devlin and I had with you the other day, in which you urged us to come to an arrangement with the Southern Unionists, and thereby strengthen your hands in dealing with the Ulster Unionists, should they in the end stand out against an agreement come to by all the rest of Ireland."

And Redmond went on: "I understood from you that in that eventuality—that is to say, if we could come to an arrangement with the Southern Unionists—you would be prepared to propose that arrangement in the House of Commons and to fight the Ulster Unionists on the point, in which case, you seem to think, and I entirely agree with you, that you would have English public opinion strongly at your back.

"I quite see that under certain conditions, if Carson plays the game, he might be forced to give up his position in the Government. But as I told you the other day, remembering all the circumstances of the case, it would be a small sacrifice for him to make."

In the light of this correspondence we begin to understand the remark of Redmond's biographer in his account of these transactions: "Decisions would very soon have to be taken which would confront the small Ulster group with the prospect of finding themselves entirely isolated if they persisted in their traditional attitude of unreasoning obstruction." The War Cabinet, the Dominion Prime Ministers, they were all desperately

eager to get Ireland out of the way and propitiate the United States of America. "Individually," says Mr. Gwynn of the Government, "almost all its members could be counted upon—with the exception of Carson—. . . to carry through any reasonable agreement without delay. Redmond did believe absolutely, on the strength of Lloyd George's public pledges, that any isolated opposition by the Orangemen would be overborne."<sup>1</sup>

As a matter of fact there were no such public pledges: on the contrary, all the public pledges went the other way. The secret pledges which may have encouraged Redmond in these delusive hopes we must now consider.

Lord Midleton was in touch both with Redmond on the one side and Lord Curzon on the other. He had gone to London at the end of the year and had returned with a pledge in the handwriting of Lord Curzon, initialled by the Prime Minister, which he showed to John Redmond, who made a copy of it. Here it is:

"31st December, 1917.

"If the Southern Unionist scheme is carried by the Convention with substantial agreement—i.e. with the opposition of Ulster alone—the Prime Minister will use his personal influence with his colleagues, the sympathies of many of whom are well known, to accept the proposal and to give it legislative effect.

"D. L. G."<sup>2</sup>

We gather that Mr. Redmond was not entirely satisfied with this document since he kept pressing for some "definite assurance"—"quite privately and confidentially . . . not merely of your own goodwill in this matter but of the intention of the Cabinet. . . ."

Things were getting hot. Lady Carson noted in her Diary, under 13th January, 1918, that Mr. Barrie came to tea to talk with Edward about the Convention. . . . This all makes Edward's position in the Government almost impossible." Carson, indeed, was not altogether alone. On the 15th Lady Carson noted: "Lord Milner and Bonar Law have hinted to Edward that

<sup>1</sup> Denis Gwynn, *Life of John Redmond*, p. 567.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 579.

they may not be able to stay in the Cabinet if Ulster is coerced to come into Home Rule; but I hope they will prove as brave when the time comes."

In the meantime Lord Midleton had been screwed to the point of a further concession. He agreed to the transfer of Excise to an Irish Government and to the collection, although not to the imposition, of Customs by an Irish Government.

For Redmond that was enough. He saw the point had come at which to strike. He did not consult the Nationalist delegates; he was still, he thought, their leader. He rose in his place and gave notice to accept Lord Midleton's proposals on the condition that they be "adopted by His Majesty's Government as a settlement of the Irish question, and legislative effect be given to them forthwith."

Never had he pressed a case with an urgency more desperate. "Is there a man in this room," he asked, "who can contemplate without horror the immediate future of Ireland if this Convention fails? . . . On the one side a maddened people and on the other a Government ruling it at the point of the bayonet—between these two forces there will be no place for a constitutional party or for men like myself."

The Convention, before coming to a decision, adjourned for ten days. If Redmond had been in good health, or if he had been in control of his party organisation, he would certainly have used the interval to canvass support. As it was he retired to Aughavanagh and left the field clear to the Bishop of Raphoe.

On the 14th of January, 1918, the Convention resumed its sittings and Redmond entered the hall like a man whose doom was already sealed. "He needn't trouble," he said of someone who had offered to second his Motion (technically his Amendment), "I'm not going to move it. Devlin and the Bishops are voting against me." He rose heavily among these expectant Irishmen, awed and uneasy under his tragic look. He had heard since entering the building, he explained, that "some important Nationalist representatives were against him," and he did not intend to divide his party even if he could have carried his point. He would not therefore press it. "The others will give their advice. I feel that I can be of no further service to the Convention. . . ."

Redmond sat down, a beaten and a dying man.

He did indeed make one more effort, which was to be nearly fatal to the War Cabinet. He wrote again to the Prime Minister: he was satisfied in his mind that if the objecting Nationalists were convinced that the arrangement would be immediately carried into effect by the Government, notwithstanding the opposition of Ulster, they would agree.

That appeal was made on the 17th January, 1918. We know that it was reinforced by representations from the United States. Only a few days before there had been an urgent telegram from F. E. Smith: a crisis, he said, was impending in America and an Irish settlement was essential. Lord Northcliffe agreed and had told the Prime Minister that he was "ready to use the whole organisation of the newspaper world to back the settlement if arrived at. . . ."<sup>1</sup>

We may suppose that Lloyd George put the case to his colleagues. "Edward," Lady Carson notes on the 18th January, 1918, "is on the verge of leaving the Cabinet, as it is impossible for him to remain there while they are trying to settle Ireland, either way! and of course if they tried to coerce Ulster he would come out at once." And again, on the 19th: "Ronald McNeill and James Craig and Edward consulted, and Edward is to leave the Cabinet at once saying he is going so to relieve the Government of his embarrassing presence whilst Ireland is being arranged."

On Sunday the 20th, "Edward has written . . . to Lloyd George giving his reasons for going, and there is going to be no delay and no talk about it . . . much the best way to do things."

That same day Carson had some interesting news from his friend, Fred Oliver, who, with Lord Selborne, had been working on a federal scheme of Home Rule all round, with separate Parliament for Ulster.

"I was rung up last night by Horace Plunkett who told me he was going back by the mail. You probably know he has been over for two days. I didn't. His conversation was of the rather 'foolishly hopeful' order. Clearly he is not cutting ice at the moment.

<sup>1</sup> Denis Gwynn, *Life of John Redmond*, p. 588.

"He has not behaved quite fairly to Selborne and me about our Memorandum and draft Bill. He undertook to circulate them—indeed he begged to be allowed to do so: and begged me not to. Now it appears he has not circulated them at all. He might at least have told us that he wasn't doing so. . . .

"Plunkett, by the way, blamed Maynooth for the failure of his pacification—Maynooth which doesn't want Home Rule."

If Carson had any lingering doubts of the wisdom of his decision they were removed at the Cabinet meeting next day. The Prime Minister, who had seen Sir Horace Plunkett on the Saturday, and heard how critically things stood with the Convention, had since written a letter to the Chairman. If and when a point was reached at which no further progress could be made representatives were to be sent to confer with the Cabinet.

"The Government," Mr. Lloyd George concluded, "are agreed and determined that a solution must be found. But they are firmly convinced that the best hope of a settlement lies within the Convention and they are prepared to do anything in their power to assist the Convention finally to reach a basis of agreement, which would enable a new Irish Constitution to come into operation with the consent of all parties."

These words, it will be seen, were ambiguous. "The Government are agreed and determined that a solution must be found," savoured of coercion: if the Convention could not find it, the Government would; on the other hand the last sentence seemed to stipulate "the consent of all parties" concerned. Whatever they might mean these smooth phrases implied an entanglement from which Carson was determined to be free. "You can hardly expect me, Mr. Prime Minister," he said as he handed it back to him, "to remain in the Cabinet after that letter. I shall not interrupt the sitting; but you must consider that I have resigned from this moment."

Sir Edward Carson, however, had no desire to weaken the Administration which he proposed to leave. The state of the war and the country was too critical. All he desired was his freedom.

The exchange of letters, which appeared in the Press of the 22nd January, 1918, was carefully designed to the end of reassuring the public—Carson wrote:

"MY DEAR PRIME MINISTER,—When I joined your Cabinet, I had no consideration in my mind but the prosecution of the war and I did not anticipate that the question of Irish Government would be reopened during the war. Subsequently, when the Convention was proposed I thought it right to use any influence I had in inducing my Ulster friends to take part in the effort to come to some settlement. But on account of the dual position as Member of the Government and as leader of the Ulster Unionist Party I have felt it incumbent on me to stand aloof from the proceedings of the Convention. It is, however, apparent that whatever the result of the Convention may be, its proceedings may lead to a situation demanding a decision by the Government of grave matters of policy in Ireland. After anxious consideration, I feel certain that it will be of advantage to the War Cabinet to discuss this policy without my presence, having regard to the very prominent part which I have taken in the past in relation to the Home Rule controversy and to the pledges by which I am bound to my friends in Ulster.

"I also desire to be entirely unfettered myself in forming a judgment as to the new situation which may arise, taking account of the supreme duty which rests on all of us of assisting in the prosecution of the war and of my personal obligation as a leader of the Ulster Unionist Party. I, therefore, have made up my mind to resign my position in the War Cabinet.

"In coming to this decision I have been influenced solely by the consideration which I have referred to above. I should like it to be clearly understood that since I joined the Government there has never been any matter of policy, either in connection with the conduct of the war or the principles and aims for which we are fighting in relation to which I have found myself in disagreement with you or any other colleagues in the War Cabinet. I very much regret this severance; but as I am convinced, for the reasons I have given, that it is for the national advantage at the present juncture, I have no hesitation in asking you to place my resignation in the hands of the King.

"Yours sincerely,

"EDWARD CARSON."

The Prime Minister, on his side, received this letter "with the deepest and most unfeigned regret because of the value I attach to the unvarying courage and sagacity which you have brought to the counsels of the nation at this juncture." He recognised, however, Carson's special difficulties, "and although as you know I have fought hard and repeatedly against the conclusion you have come to, I am compelled to admit that under present circumstances there is wisdom in the course you have taken."

"I realise," the Prime Minister proceeded, "that you have taken it in no partisan spirit for ever since the war began you have always placed victory for your country above all sectional prejudice or advantage."

"May I take this opportunity," Mr. Lloyd George concluded, "of thanking you for your very great help and unwavering loyalty during the year we have been associated together in this terrible task."

With such mutual civilities these two parted. "Sir Edward," Mrs. Spender wrote to her husband, "is very unhappy . . . Lord Milner has been very nice and understanding about it—the only man who *really* seems to understand. The Lord Chancellor said, 'Why didn't you wait until Ulster *is* coerced, or some definite step of that kind taken? I should have left the Government myself then.' But Sir Edward said if he had waited till then others would have come too, and people would have said he did it to wreck the Government. By going now, he avoids that and stands or falls by himself. Balfour and Bonar Law can only shake their heads and say it is the death-blow of the Cabinet. . . ."

It is plain that Carson wanted to be free to face the duty which he foresaw, to give honest advice to his friends, whether to accept or reject what might be offered to them.

That faithful friend Sir James Craig—he had been made a baronet at the New Year—who had been Treasurer of the Household, went with Carson. They knew each other's minds. They would go over to Ulster.



## CHAPTER XXXIV

### *Oliver's Letters*

Carson in Belfast – Federation – Littlehampton – Oliver's letters – Gwynne and Repington – The War Office – The fall of Robertson.

THE reader will recall that John Redmond had pleaded with Carson, through Mr. Lloyd George, "to come over to Ulster as he did in 1916," and added—"if Carson plays the game he might be forced to give up his position in the Government." Was it, then, to persuade Ulster to some appointed course that Carson made that pilgrimage? Sir Horace Plunkett evidently expected something of the sort for he wrote to John Redmond on the 23rd January, 1918: "Nothing is yet known of Carson's intentions; but it is believed that he means to try to bring about a settlement. He is to meet the Ulster Unionist Council publicly and the Standing Committee privately next week in Belfast, and I do not think we ought to bring the Convention to a close until we know what the Ulster Unionists are going to do."<sup>1</sup>

Plunkett, who lived much in dreams, deluded himself: Redmond knew better. Redmond knew that the last chance of a settlement upon constitutional lines had been marred by the Bishop of Raphoe and his friends, who had demanded so much more than it was reasonable to ask or possible to concede.

Redmond, himself, did not blame either Carson or the Ulstermen for that catastrophe. On 14th February, 1918, from his sick bed he dictated his candid opinion in a letter to a friend:

"I do not think you need trouble your head about Customs," he said. "... it is quite certain that the Nationalist Members of the Convention will wreck any chance of a settlement rather than give way on this point.

"We are offered a Parliament for the whole of Ireland, with full and complete control over every purely Irish affair, both legislative and administrative, including land, education, local

<sup>1</sup> Denis Gwynn, *Life of John Redmond*, p. 591.

government, old age pensions, insurance, police, judiciary and everything else, with full and complete control over all internal taxation, with its collection and its imposition, including excise; that is to say a Parliament infinitely better than ever was suggested by Butt, Parnell or Gladstone. And, because we are not getting the immediate control of the imposition of Customs (we are offered the collection of them) which we all declare we would not and could not put into force against England even if we got it, we are going to face the future with a wrecked Convention, and apparently a light heart."<sup>1</sup>

Redmond, then, knew that neither could Ulster accept nor could Carson commend proposals which he himself, Nationalist as he was, thought to be extravagant and unreasonable.

It was like old times, that visit to Ulster, old times with a difference: the steamer from Stranraer, escorted, however, by a destroyer; the enormous cheering crowds at Larne and Carrickfergus, the working men at Belfast carrying their "Sir Edward" out of the station shoulder-high; 800 Boy Scouts "cheering until we were nearly deafened"—"wonderful little boys, so good-looking, strong and sturdy." Then on Sunday<sup>2</sup> a sermon from the Moderator of the Presbyterian Church in the morning and another from the Bishop of Down in the Cathedral in the afternoon, on the text that "Ulster was as firm as ever and would not climb down," with the favourite Ulster hymn—"O God our help in ages past." They never forgot "ages past" in Ulster. On Monday a visit to the Ulster Volunteer Hospital, "so beautifully run," and to the officers' hospital, and to Craigavon, that country house of stirring memories, by that time given by James Craig as a home for the shell-shocked; then to the Model Bakery, where the bakers and the millers provided bread free for the aforesaid hospital, and to the offices of the Ulster Women's Gift Fund to see parcels packed for the prisoners of war—"all most beautifully organised and all paid for by the Province."

On Tuesday a visit to the shipyards, with the Clarks and the Pirries—the workmen crowding round and cheering; on Wednesday a tour of the villages—"all the Orangemen in Sashes"—

<sup>1</sup> Denis Gwynn, *Life of John Redmond*, p. 592.

<sup>2</sup> 3rd February, 1918. The quotations are from Lady Carson's Diary.

addresses for Sir Edward and linen tablecloths and napkins, diapered with William of Orange on his white horse, for Lady Carson. And so at last to Larne—"the station kept in grand order by the shipyard men. Great cheering and good-byes." "It's too lovely to see the way the people worship Edward and follow him about," Lady Carson notes with pardonable pride. "I am more and more Ulster every time I come over."

They also adopted her in their rough familiar way, these Ulster people. As she waited in the car outside the Club for Sir Edward, with a window down, a shawled woman got up on the step, looked in and examined her. Then stepping down she shouted loudly, "It's his wife." A second stepped up, had a look and remarked as she got down, "She's vara young!" Whereupon a third mounted the step, put her head in to have a good look, and shouted to her friends, "She's no sae young as a' that!"<sup>1</sup>

As for the serious business of the visit Carson met the Ulster Unionist Council and the Standing Committee at Belfast on the 2nd February, 1918, and explained to them his reasons for resigning from the Government. He felt that they must be "absolutely free to discuss this matter." For himself he was bound by his pledges to them and to the Covenant: "No man could give honest advice in two different capacities."

Then he went on to say what all reasonable men felt: they desired a settlement in their own interests, so that they could know where they were, be done with uncertainty and get on with their business. "We will examine," he said, "in the most reasonable way, any proposals which may be put forward," all the more because they wanted to relieve the Government of its anxieties. He protested, however, against what was alleged of the unreasonableness of Ulster, and against the "childish idea" that America would not fight unless Home Rule was conceded. He thought no Government would be mad enough to force upon them any settlement which they could not accept, and any settlement acceptable to them must secure their liberties and their position in the British Empire.

That Carson understood what stern realities lay at the back of these debates is clear from a phrase in his final speech at Dromore: "A man did not get tired of fighting for his life."

<sup>1</sup> Colonel Repington, *The First World War*, vol. ii., p. 284.

While Carson was still in Ireland, his friend Fred Oliver, the accomplished author of the *Life of Hamilton*, was putting the last touches on a very interesting paper—at once a statement of the case for Ulster and proposals for a federal settlement. "Of course," Oliver wrote to Carson in sending him the essay, "constitutional politics are not like arithmetic, where 4 and 3 make 7, just as much as 3 and 4 make 7. Rather, they are like a certain kind of knot where firmness depends on the way you hold the string, and the order in which you pull each loop in turn. . . . So in this affair—the firmness and success depends on the manner of doing as upon the things proposed to be done." It was a truth which Carson understood perhaps better than Oliver, since he knew his fellow Irishmen. Yet he had the wit to see the value of Oliver's ideas, and in the weeks which followed there was a good deal of correspondence on the subject between the two men.

It would be impossible within the brief compass of this narrative to give Oliver's scheme for a federation of the United Kingdom; but its application to Ulster concerns our story. His Parliament of the Union was to possess a real supremacy—that is to say, it was to reserve such vital matters as Customs and Defence. It was, moreover, to be a true federation. England and Scotland separately, or England and Scotland together, were to have local Parliaments with the same powers as the Irish Parliament. There was to be no difference in the relations to Ireland on the one hand and to England and Scotland on the other: "Every Home Rule Bill which has yet been introduced has made shipwreck on this reef."

"We are told that a true Federation is impossible because England and Scotland do not desire to have their national affairs managed by one or more subordinate Parliaments. They are satisfied with the present arrangements. But we also [Oliver imagines himself to be speaking for Ulster] are satisfied with the present arrangements. Why should England and Scotland insist upon forcing us to go under a system which they will not themselves accept?"

Ulster would accept a true federation; but if the Irish part of it was too pressing to wait, let the South and West of Ireland be given their Parliament on federal lines, "and let Ulster stand

out until such time as England and Scotland can be brought in."

"If your people can bring themselves to put this proposal forward," urged Oliver, "I think (a) they will have England and Scotland and U.S.A. absolutely on their side and (b) they will carry it."

We shall see presently how Carson treated these ideas. In the meantime the travellers returned across the Irish Sea (in which three ships had been sunk by submarines or mines the night before their crossing) to a dark and anxious London. On the 8th February, 1918, Lady Carson noted, "Edward had breakfast with the P.M., who, of course, talked a lot of rot about Ulster."

The state of Carson's health demanded rest. He had worked hard in his year of office. Of the 188 meetings of the War Cabinet while he was First Lord he had attended 109; of the 189 meetings held while he was a Member of the War Cabinet, he had been present at 120. He had been Chairman, besides, of the War Cabinet Committee on the pay of soldiers and sailors, which had arranged increases both for the Army and the Navy in the latter part of 1917, and of this Committee he was to remain Chairman for four months after leaving the War Cabinet. He had been, as we have seen, in charge of all propaganda; as the result of a memorandum written by himself he had been Chairman of the War Cabinet Committee on the Economic Offensive and Trade War against Germany. He had been Chairman, besides, for a time of the War Aims Committee, and had been indefatigable in keeping up the spirit of the nation by Ministerial visits and speeches: he had addressed workmen and cities. He stood in need of repose.

They went down (on February the 8th, 1918) to the Beach Hotel at Littlehampton, and we find a wifely note in the diary: "It's lovely having Edward to myself the whole day long and it so seldom happens." But it was not to be for long. Rumours and reports reached them from London. Sir William Robertson had been removed; Lloyd George had been badly heckled in the House.—"It will do him a lot of good," Lady Carson observed.

That little holiday in Littlehampton intended only for rest was, nevertheless, to be occupied with pressing and urgent

affairs, from which Carson could not escape, even if he had desired. With a letter a day and sometimes two, his friend Oliver (with Milner at the centre of things in Downing Street) kept him posted on the news and debated with him the heads and the merits of "True Federation."

"It does not seem to me possible," Oliver wrote on the 11th February, "to have a patched-up temporary arrangement for the duration of the war. That will only entangle people's feet and will increase the bitterness and distrust which are in their hearts."

"I suggest that the right plan is to force the hand of the Prime Minister and make Federation a practical way out. That will really be a kindness. It will be done if your people will adopt some such manifesto as I wrote."

"Failing that, I might recast it and make it into a manifesto for the Unionist Federalists who number nearly 40 in the House of Commons."

"Will you think over these alternatives and tell me when you come back? . . . If the case of Ulster were put, and the offer of Ulster were made in the same document, I think the whole issue would at once be changed, and put into a plane where it could be settled."

"There is no good fuming over the Beaverbrook appointment.<sup>1</sup> Now that it is made I'll do what I can to smooth the ruffled feathers of the various indignant politicians who have been exploding at me all day at the telephone and in the Club. Buchan seems to think that B. will do the work as well as another. That is enough in these times and we have got to do what we can to grease the wheels."

"The Economic Offensive is at present like Mahomet's coffin—suspended. I don't think its future looks very promising just now."

"I hear that Addison's famous Raw Material Committee has broken down. I'm not surprised; and if the news is true it will account for the fact that he has never yet tabled the scheme which he promised to let me have by January 23rd though I've been at him every few days."

<sup>1</sup> Lord Beaverbrook had been made Minister of Information and thus had taken over part of Carson's work in the Government.

"Henry Wilson is over though I have not yet seen him. Of course the chief fuss is the Army Council v. the War Cabinet. I'm not naturally prone to side with the politicians against the soldiers but (a) on the merits I think they are entirely right in this case: I had a long talk with Milner on Friday, and (b) the W. Office censorship is playing a very odd game letting things like Repington's articles appear: also in letting leakages occur to Maxse's paper.

"Surely the real issue is this—H. Wilson has the confidence of the War Cabinet as strategist and Robertson has not. That being so, the sooner they make H. Wilson C.I.G.S. the better. . . . The War Cabinet is responsible and has a duty to choose the best man. It may make a mistake but it should have the courage to follow its opinions. Nothing is worse than wobbling through a man with whose views you are not in sympathy and who is not in sympathy with yours.

"Meanwhile Labour is very difficult.

"The only bright spot is poor Austria. There seems to be no doubt that the Emperor is struggling for peace against his Prussian masters and that Bavaria and Wurtemberg and Saxony are with him. I shouldn't wonder if some of those German troops released from the East were sent South into Austria and not West.

"How far the devils have confidence in this new gas no one seems to know but it is clear that they are waiting now for the East wind. . . ."

Carson must have replied on the theme of "True Federation," for on the 13th February Oliver expressed his delight that Carson was "going to take the line you propose."

On the 13th Oliver wrote:

"I always knew that your absence would be a great handicap to the Government; but the last few days have proved that it would be a greater loss even than I feared it would be. The Prime Minister needs at least two people to hold him to any decision; with only one doing it he wobbles and wriggles and gets into the most lamentable messes in consequence. Milner alone can't do it: even with Barnes's help (and B. appears to be the only other staunch one) he can't do it; for Barnes isn't strong enough or sufficiently at his ease. Bonar and Curzon are

no more good than sick headaches. And so they have got themselves and the country into the very worst mess we've been in yet since the war began—politically speaking. Last night's debate was a degrading exhibition. To do him justice L. G. was much below par; but the real root of the trouble was that he went into the House of Commons without having made up his mind!

"You are quite right. There is only one way. Whoever is C.I.G.S. trust him. If he isn't the best C.I.G.S. then take the responsibility on your own shoulders and change him: appoint the man you believe in, and leave him a free hand. In the circumstances the only way in my opinion is to make Henry Wilson C.I.G.S.

"But the debate last night was a much more serious thing than a Ministerial blunder. It is the worst symptom we have yet had of a general rot setting in.

"Asquith has been talking freely. He says we must have peace or we will have revolution. Therefore the formula is—'Peace: if possible an English peace; but failing that a German peace rather than none.' The Pacifists all have their tails up over their heads to-day. Squiff played for their cheers and got them.

"And unless L. G. will take his courage in both hands and come down and make a frank and full statement about the Versailles business—for Repington and Squiff between them have made it necessary to choose this as the lesser evil though it will inform the enemy—I really think things are in the soup. Milner is very much worried. I wish you were here."

It was not only in the House that the Government was heckled. Despite the general subservience of the Press, there were good friends of the Army who knew the truth, and were determined to have it out. One of them, Colonel Repington (whom Oliver evidently did not like), when he found himself muzzled in *The Times*, went to the *Morning Post*, and wrote an article denouncing political interference with the Commander-in-Chief and the General Staff. "Prime Ministers and others," he wrote, "have recently resolved themselves into a Council of War, have revelled in strategy and have exclusively occupied themselves in teaching soldiers how and where to make war." The Prime Minister, he



went on to say, has "practically eliminated the General Staff in London from authority on the Western Front and deprived the Field Marshal Commander-in-Chief from one of his most indispensable means of action (control of reserves)." And Repington went on to denounce the "side-shows"—political enterprises which drained strength from the vital centres of war.

This article the Editor sent to the Press Bureau, and, when the Censor returned it marked "Not to be published," published it next day with the note: "There are times when we must take our courage in both hands and risk the consequences."

"Had a wire this evening," Lady Carson noted in her diary (13th February, 1918), "to say Mr. Gwynne and Repington of *Morning Post* are going to be prosecuted under the Defence of the Realm Act for sticking up for Haig and Robertson. Edward was asked to defend them; but having left the Cabinet so short a time, he says he can't. I am so sorry as he would have made mincemeat of them. L. G. daren't attack the Northcliffe Press because he is frightened of them."<sup>1</sup>

Irishmen also knocked importunately at his door. "Barrie wants Edward," Lady Carson noted on the 15th, "to go over to Belfast for Tuesday week. They really expect too much." On the 16th another letter from Oliver with more gossip of politics. Oliver's gossip was amusing:

"Among the bitternesses of wobbles, wriggles and wangles, of delays, national inquiries resulting therefrom, quarrels, jealousies, backbitings and all the rest of it, which make the heart of man sick, there are some comedies—even farces—being played in our neighbourhood.

"For instance I met Beaverbrook coming down the stairs to-day with John Buchan and shook hands. I didn't dislike the little ruffian nearly as much as I expected to.

"The farce is that he has decided to occupy your room. That is a mistake. He will bring the hornets of the Unionist Party

<sup>1</sup> The Editor and his Military Correspondent were in due course found guilty by the Stipendiary Magistrate at Bow Street and fined each 100 guineas and 40 guineas costs. Carson told a friend he would have taken an entirely different line—that the Editor had acted from patriotism and was prepared to face the penalty. He would have attempted no legal justification.

round his ears. Of course they are stingless hornets, so they can only buzz at him impotently; but it will make trouble, for they will think (as he indeed intends) that he is preparing to go into the War Cabinet. So as trouble is a bad thing, I have put before Milner the importance of getting him transferred to the office of the Duchy of Lancaster as soon as may be. But I shall be amused to see if the Goat and Hankey between them will be able to evict him.

"No, my friend, it is not true that Henry [Wilson] has been intriguing. It is just as untrue that Robertson has been intriguing. But the Goat has certainly been intriguing; and so everyone who comes into touch or conflict with him gets tarred with the same brush. If you knew all you would agree that Henry has behaved exceedingly well, and been abominably treated...

"The Cabinet discussion on Ireland yesterday was I understand a very woolly thing. What happened at L. G.'s meeting afterwards with the delegates I haven't yet heard."

That day Ronald McNeill also wrote to Carson. He had seen Barrie and Londonderry (who had been called over to be harangued on their duty by the Prime Minister) and they were both, says Lady Carson in her diary, "very worried and upset at not seeing Edward. It's funny not one of them can do anything for themselves. And there was nothing to talk about, Edward having settled everything when he was over."

Oliver's next letter, written on the 15th, touches on the news of the alarming state of Ireland which broke in rudely upon his federal plans:

"After all the Convention is a subordinate matter," he wrote, "and a settlement is only slightly more so."

"Surely the main thing is to nip in the bud a new and much more formidable rebellion. The following is my prescription which I daresay you will think very ignorant."

"(1) Remove Wimborne and Duke.

"(2) Publish the facts of the present state of Ireland.

"(3) Appoint W. Long Viceroy (Cabinet) and 'Wullie' (Sir William Robertson) Chief Secretary and Commander-in-Chief.

"(4) Declare Martial Law.

Wc

"As an alternative to (8) make Wullie Viceroy with full military power. An absolutely first class Q.M.G. mind and character would probably be able to save the situation.

"All four steps to be taken within a space of time not longer than 24 hours. So that swift surprise falls on Sin Fin.

"I'm getting rather fussed about having the Ulster case stated before the Rebellion occurs."

On the same day he wrote again expressing the fatal doubt which crippled British action: "A danger, however, is that if action comes before opinion in America, etc., is educated as to the behaviour of the Sin Fins, etc., it may look like repression and oppression and all the rest of it."

"The Prime Minister," Oliver added, "is really ill, not shamming. He is down at Walton Heath, but is coming to-day for a Cabinet."

And again Oliver wrote on the 16th:

"I think very likely you will find yourself constrained to come up on Monday.

"Between you and me things are pretty dicky here, though you probably know more than I do about it.

"It is not the badness of their plans that is the trouble—indeed I think their plans here are sound enough. It is simply and solely that the Prime Minister's nerve went on Monday (so I diagnose the performance in the House of Commons) and he has not been able to recover it; or to make up his mind to anything reasonable; or to stick to any course of conduct for more than an hour or two. It is so much easier to be simple than ingenious, to tell the truth rather than lies, to stand fast rather than run away, to go straight rather than crooked, to work in sympathy rather than by fault-finding—that one wonders why the hell anything so clever as the Goat shouldn't have discovered this great secret long ago!

"So far I think Wullie is cock of the walk. I admire his character but imagination is not his strong point, and it is a thousand pities that Henry Wilson's gifts can't be fully availed of. His work at Versailles, I hear on good authority, is quite first-class, and he dominates in the Council of our Allies. It's a beastly mess. Damn! Damn!! Damn!!!"

"Edward" (Lady Carson noted on the 17th) "had more

letters saying that things are at sixes and sevens; but Edward can do nothing at present and Lloyd George may behave better after he has been badly shaken."

On the evening of the 16th Oliver wrote again, going further into the War Office imbroglio than we need follow him. "Things are apparently," he said, "no nearer a real settlement than they have been at any time since the trouble began. This is a national misfortune for if it continues it can only end in the downfall of the Government, in the return of Squiff (with or without Lansdowne) and the formation of a Ministry which everyone will know is dominated by the idea of getting peace as quickly as possible. Of course our friends the Huns will know that as well as anyone else. We could not negotiate for peace under worse auspices or conduct the war with less of our hearts in it. *This is the central dominating consideration.*"

Then Oliver described the persons in the case. The Prime Minister after "something very much resembling a physical breakdown," unable to make up his mind, "or rather he is always making up his mind and then changing it," unwilling to face the crux of the whole thing, which Oliver thought was to remove Lord Derby from the War Office and appoint a Secretary of State with "the necessary backbone and ability." Oliver thought Milner the right man for the job:

"Both Wullie and Henry," Oliver continued, "have behaved well though of course they disagree. Haig, who is coming over to-night has been admirable. Hankey has worked his hardest and has kept his head cool and his hands clean.

"But Bonar is in a shiver, now one way, now another, Curzon, scenting danger and discredit . . . off to Kedleston . . . I suppose he is lying-in; Smuts of course away; A. J. B. . . . no help at all with his dilemmas and subtleties. And the House of Commons will meet to-morrow in an angry mood.

"Briefly therefore to my conclusion—I think the fate of the Government and of the country may be decided by the action or inaction of yourself and Austen on Monday. I shrink from advising anyone in matters of personal duty. I will only say that I wish to God you would come back."

Carson held a different view of the crisis: he knew the Government was safe enough because the House feared the alternative.

He was, moreover, still recruiting his ravaged health. He remained where he was.

In the meanwhile Sir William Robertson had resigned. Carson, who had upheld him to the best of his ability in the Cabinet, wrote him a letter which must have been some balm at least to his wounded spirit. On the 20th February, Lady Carson notes, "Edward had the most splendid letter from Sir William Robertson." "Sir Edward," Mrs. Spender wrote to her husband, "believes in him as we do, and when he wrote to him to say how sorry he was, etc., he got the most extraordinarily nice letter back from Sir William, in which he said he had had a very bad time since Sir Edward left, but that he had meant to stick it out for the country's sake and did till it became impossible. It was the letter, Ruby said, of the most high-bred gentleman, and she thinks he is a wonderful man."

## CHAPTER XXXV

### *Carson-Oliver*

A joint letter—Tea at the Beach Hotel—Balfour and Salisbury—Return to Town—Death of John Redmond—More about Jellicoe—The Fifth Army—Conscription and Home Rule.

WE must now come to the letter which was the main theme and result of the Oliver correspondence and the central point of that Littlehampton holiday.

On the 14th February, 1918, Sir Edward Carson wrote to the Prime Minister:

*“ Confidential.*

Beach Hotel, Littlehampton,

*“ Feb. 14th, 1918.*

“ MY DEAR PRIME MINISTER,—I have been suffering from a severe cold and cough and have to take care it does not settle on my lungs, so I could not go up to-day. However I do not think it is advisable I should join the delegates in meeting you. My position to the Ulster people is a very definite one, viz. that I shall not enter into agreement without consulting them and I shall be prepared to submit to their representatives any scheme which seems proper, but only when it is in such shape that in the event of its adoption it will be considered binding.

“ Since I have returned from Ireland I have been thinking a good deal of the possibilities of a settlement during the war. It is clear to my mind that no settlement consistent with the interests of Great Britain can be devised which will satisfy the Sinn Fein or the extreme Nationalist Party who sympathise with Sinn Fein.

“ If therefore attempt is made to bring Ulster into an Irish Parliament to which they are averse you will have both Sinn Fein and Ulster in opposition to the new Government, and I do not believe that any Government started under such circumstances would have the least chance of success. The

promises made to Ulster when the war broke out were very distinct and were frequently repeated by me when I was asking the people to join the Army. Viz. That no attempt would be made to set up a Home Rule Parliament in Ireland during the continuance of the war, and indeed this was provided by legislation. I can assure you that the Ulster people, who have suffered severely in the loss of their men at the Front, will regard it as an act of treachery if the promises are broken and Ulster is put under a Home Rule Parliament.

"Personally, I do not see how under the circumstances I could be expected to advise them to accept such a Parliament nor do I believe I would have the least chance of persuading them to do so.

"I have already, as you know, under great difficulty induced Ulster in the interest of the prosecution of the war to accept a solution on the basis of the exclusion of the six counties which meant that the rest of Ireland could have Home Rule. Such a solution preserved the Union for the vast majority of those who desired it.

"The only other possible solution seems to me to lie in a system of Federation for the whole United Kingdom.

"Averse as I am from any change in the present Constitution with its single Parliament for all purposes, I do not deny that the Union which I regard as the keystone of the British Commonwealth may nevertheless be preserved upon the principles of true federation.

"In a true federation it is essential not only that there should be constitutional equality between the nations which are to be federal units but also that the powers delegated and made over by the United Kingdom Parliament to the National Parliaments should not be such as to hamper the actual and active supremacy of the former or to set up impediments against the free intercourse of the federated Kingdoms.

"If such a policy was adopted it is easy to see that a settlement of the Ulster difficulty could be found either by making Ulster a unit or by providing for its particular needs within another unit.

"The whole difference is that in this case the Parliament of the Union would possess a real supremacy and not merely

a titular suzerainty, and further such solution would not be in the direction of separation or secession, which seems to me to be of vital importance.

"It will be said that the Irish problem is so pressing that it cannot wait for a true federation of the United Kingdom. At any rate let us settle the lines upon which this true federation is ultimately to be made.

"When this is done, let the South and West of Ireland have their act with any necessary safeguards and let Ulster stand out until such time as England and Scotland can be brought in.

"I have put this forward to show how untrue it is that Ulster presents a *non possumus* attitude. While I think that all the discussions show that the Union as it stands is the best solution, I believe the True Federation is the only alternative.

"Yours sincerely,

"EDWARD CARSON."

Now it will be evident from our summary of the Oliver memorandum that this letter was a joint production: the first half was Carson's, the latter part Oliver's. Some of the passages are, indeed, taken verbatim from Oliver's draft. Oliver was delighted. "Needless to say," he wrote on the 18th, "I admire your letter to the Prime Minister. You have taken my long-winded curlicues and turned them into something which is action not words. I shall be interested to hear what is the result. Knowing your relations with Milner, I am going to show him the document in case the Goat is sitting on it."

The Goat apparently did sit upon it for a while. In a brief letter of the 19th February, 1918, he made only a glancing reference to it:

"MY DEAR CARSON,—I am far from satisfied with Irish Government. As you know, we gave Duke and Mahon a free hand to suppress these Bolsheviks.

"How would Robertson do for Ireland?

"I hope your cold is vanishing in the genial atmosphere.

"Yours sincerely,

"D. LLOYD GEORGE."



When he wrote again on the 22nd, he was hardly more explicit:

"Many thanks for your letter which I had hoped to acknowledge sooner. I have just been ordered off for two or three days' rest by the doctor.

"I do hope you will if possible give your support to the lines indicated in the letter which Barrie has taken back with him, and will have before him when he meets his advisory Committee on Monday. I enclose a copy.

"I hope you yourself are keeping better. I am staying at Goring and may run over to see you to-morrow or Sunday."

The letter which Mr. Lloyd George enclosed was an urgent exhortation to the Chairman of the Ulster delegates on the need for an Irish settlement "now during the war" for the sake of Ireland, of the Empire and of our relations with the United States. If the Convention failed it would be a task "incumbent on the Government"; but it was of the highest importance that the settlement should come from an Irish Assembly and to secure this "there must be concessions on all sides." The only hope of agreement lay in a solution which "on the one side provides for the Unity of Ireland under a single legislature and on the other preserves the well-being of the Empire and the fundamental unity of the United Kingdom and adequately safeguards the interests of Ulster and the Southern Unionists."

The Government had in mind the "reorganisation of the affairs of the United Kingdom on a federal basis," and the settlement should therefore be "compatible with the final realisation of a federal system of the United Kingdom."

"For this reason," continued the Prime Minister, "a system would be preferable which would leave Customs and Excise in the first instance under the control of the Imperial Parliament. The Government, however, recognise that a strong claim can be made that an Irish Parliament should have some control over indirect taxation as the only form of taxation which touches the great majority of the people, and which, at least in peace time, represents the greater part of Irish revenue. At the same time during the war it is undesirable that there should be any disturbance in the fiscal and financial relations of Great Britain and Ireland."

Customs and Excise should therefore remain with the Imperial Parliament during the war and for the ultimate settlement a Joint Exchequer Board and a Royal Commission should be provided.

As for the special claims of Ulster there might be additional representatives for Unionists, an Ulster Committee within the Irish Parliament "to modify or if necessary to exclude the application to Ulster of certain measures . . . not consonant with the interests of Ulster," and the Irish Parliament might meet in alternate sessions in Dublin and Belfast.

And the letter ended with an appeal to the Ulster representatives "to return to the Convention with authority to express acceptance of the principles of a single legislature for an united Ireland and to state the conditions and safeguards which are necessary to make the idea of such a Parliament acceptable to their constituencies."

It must have been evident to Carson, from the equivocal passage quoted, that Mr. Lloyd George was prepared to shuffle in the matter of Customs, and either did not intend a "true federation" or did not see that true federation and a separate fiscal system were incompatible.

The letter, then, did not altogether remove the impression which Lady Carson suggests in an entry under the 20th February, 1918: "Mr. Barrie came down for an hour to talk to Edward about the Convention and Lloyd George's part in it. He seems to be acting very slyly. . . ."

On Sunday the 24th there was what must have been a very interesting tea-party at the Beach Hotel. It is best described in the words of Lady Carson:

"The Prime Minister, Lord Milner, General Wilson and Colonel Hankey arrived for tea. The P.M. said he wanted Edward back as soon as possible. I said 'Then you must give Ulster all she wants' . . . Of course they were all charming. I think they are bent on keeping Edward in a good humour or trying to. General Wilson wasn't in nearly such good spirits as usual and I think with all his scheming he isn't as happy as he was before. . . . Colonel Hankey charming and so was Lord Milner and we really had a very cheerful tea-party which was funny."

We can hardly believe that the heads for a true federation could have been exhaustively discussed at such a gathering; but Carson did not let the matter rest. He sent copies of his letter to two trusted friends in the Conservative Party, and the replies were not altogether encouraging. Mr. Balfour wrote:

"I, like you, detest both Home Rule and Federation.

"If we cannot retain the broad outlines of the existing system (and the Irish Question has been so grossly mismanaged since 1906 that I fear this may be impossible), the solution I should prefer would be to keep Ulster as she is, and to dis-interest ourselves completely from the south and the west of Ireland, except in so far as it may be necessary to prevent its coastline being used by Enemy Powers. I fear, however, that this bold piece of surgery will find little favour anywhere. I recommended it in 1918 before the war rendered a solution pressing."

Lord Salisbury wrote more at length.

"I am quite ready [he wrote] to agree that true federation which respects (1) the interests and wishes of Ulster; (2) the actual and active supremacy of the U.K. Parliament; (3) the free intercourse of the federated Kingdoms would be Home Rule in its least objectionable form, so far as Ireland and our relations with Ireland are concerned.

"What a pity to break up the constitution of Great Britain as well!—but that would be essential.

"... One cannot but ask [Lord Salisbury went on], Can any of your three conditions conceivably grow out of the present situation? I am sure you have great doubts on this head. I speak with some diffidence to you on such a subject and I have never been clear what Nationalist Ireland really wants. But I imagine that the motive and aspirations of Sinn Fein is 'Ireland a Nation' and any step towards an Irish Parliament in response to Sinn Fein pressure will be a surrender which will invite them to defy any limitations which may be imposed or where they cannot defy them to renew their agitation against them. If that be so we must surely begin by defeating 'Ireland a Nation.' Then a concession to Irish local government would be safe."

Lord Salisbury went on to insist that while there might be devolution in the way of provincial councils there should be

"only one Parliament and only one Nation," that the Irish part must be consistent with the British part, and that even so they would have to go to the very root of our constitution in the middle of the war—"I am confident you feel all these difficulties. I confess my spirit quails before it."

In the meantime the Prime Minister seems to have been sitting on Carson's letter for on the 25th February Oliver wrote to Lord Milner:

"With all respect I would point out to you that the Prime Minister's statement to the War Cabinet 'that Sir Edward had written him a perfectly *non possumus* letter' is not correct. Sir Edward Carson's letter, in my humble opinion, amounts to very much the same thing as the Prime Minister's letter to Mr. Hugh Barrie, if the contents of this letter have been correctly reported to me. I am bound to tell you, however, that Sir Edward Carson appears to regard the Prime Minister's letter to Mr. Hugh Barrie as affording no basis for a settlement."

In the zeal for his federation Oliver went on to argue that the mediating mind should be able to bring about a settlement "within the four corners of these two letters," and to propose that some one statesman, who would be able to concentrate his whole mind upon the problem, as for example, Austen Chamberlain, Selborne or Smuts, should have the task delegated to him. And to Carson, Oliver proposed that he should meet Austen Chamberlain and Lord Selborne at dinner—"You can give us lentils and cod so as not to impinge on the meat ration!" "I am very hopeful," Oliver ended, "that if we put our backs into it we can bring the thing off."

On the 25th February, 1918, the Carsons returned to Town, Lady Carson to occupy herself with the Ulster depot, Sir Edward to find three retainers waiting for him in his room at the Temple. On Monday the 4th March the old dinners were resumed. Lord Milner, F. S. Oliver, Leopold Amery, Astor, Geoffrey Dawson of *The Times*, Austen Chamberlain and another all dined at Carson's table, though whether on lentils and cod and federalism we do not know. Ireland, at all events, could not have been far from Carson's thoughts, nor could his thoughts of Ireland have been cheerful at that time. The Convention, as he knew, was guttering out like a candle burnt to the socket. There was not,

nor could be, any approach to agreement with the Bishop of Raphoe's scheme under discussion. Barrie wrote that the Ulster delegates were voting steadily against every clause of the 21 so as to "counter the attempt of Lord MacDonnell to magnify our alleged agreements and minimise the differences." Before the curtain was let down but not before he knew the play had failed—and why—John Redmond had turned his face to the wall and died. The day after, on the 6th of March, 1918, Carson rose in his place to pay a tribute to that noble adversary. They had known each other, these two Irishmen, for thirty-five years, first as barristers on their Irish circuit and in the contests of the Forum, and then in the House of Commons, and there had always been, as Carson testified, the same courtesy, the same kindness: "I cannot recall to mind," he said, "one single bitter personal word that ever passed between John Redmond and myself." After the Buckingham Palace Conference, as they passed out of the gates, Redmond had come up to him, and said: "For the sake of the old times of the Leinster Circuit let us have a good shake hands." "And Mr. Speaker," Carson added, "we had."

Then again in the negotiations of 1916, "I had several conferences with John Redmond, and indeed he and I were not very far apart in our attempts at settlement." "Unless we can settle this interminable business," Redmond had said to him then, "you and I will be dead before anything has happened to pacify Ireland."

Carson was among the mourners at Westminster Cathedral where the beautiful and crowded obsequies of the High Mass of Requiem must have seemed to him to mark the passage not of a man only but of an epoch. The Irish had already passed under the charge of men to whom Redmond's loyalty was hateful, and it was noted by the sharp pen of Tim Healy that when the mortal remains of the old leader arrived at Kingstown on the way to the family burial place in Wexford no clergyman of the Archbishop's diocese of Dublin met the coffin.

On the same day that Carson paid this tribute to an Irish statesman, he intervened in defence of an English sailor. George Lambert, who had been Civil Lord of the Admiralty in the late Liberal Administration, was pressing the Government for

information on the dismissal of Sir John Jellicoe, and he quoted the speech which Carson had made in defence of the Admiral in the previous November. Carson, then a member of the War Cabinet, had expressed his "absolute confidence" in the First Sea Lord, yet he was still Member of the War Cabinet when Jellicoe had been dismissed. Had Carson, then, been consulted?

It was Carson himself who answered the question. "Certainly not!" he interjected, and the reply made a sensation in the House which was increased when he rose to speak. "The whole time I was First Lord," he said, "one of the greatest difficulties I had was the constant persecution—for I can call it nothing else—of certain high officials in the Admiralty." These words might have referred to the Press; but Carson went on to use others which plainly pointed at the Government. "Over and over again," he continued, "when I was at the Admiralty—I think it right to say this—I had the most constant pressure put upon me—which I need hardly say I steadfastly resisted, to remove officials and among them Sir John Jellicoe." He recognised, of course, that it was in the competence of the First Lord to make such changes as he thought right, although he deplored the fact that at such a crisis of the nation's fate its greatest sailor should be without employment.

This brought Sir Eric Geddes to his feet. "I have been accused," he said, "of conveying the decision of the Government to Sir John Jellicoe in a way which hurt his feelings."

The House was quick to seize the point. Was the right honourable gentleman not aware that his predecessor had stated expressly that the War Cabinet had not been consulted at all.

Sir Eric Geddes was willing to admit that "technically" he was responsible.

"If," Mr. Roch<sup>1</sup> retorted, "the War Cabinet was not consulted, it must be, not the technical but the actual responsibility of the First Lord."

He was, of course, responsible, the First Lord replied; but he had consulted certain of his colleagues in the War Cabinet. Pressed as to whom he had consulted, he regretted that he could not go "further into the matter."

It was obvious both from his admissions and his reserves that

<sup>1</sup> Walter Francis Roch, Liberal Member for Pembrokeshire, 1908-18.

Sir Eric Geddes had not consulted the War Cabinet but the Prime Minister before dismissing Sir John Jellicoe. The First Lord did not state, what was nevertheless a fact, that he himself, before he carried things so far, had offered his own resignation to the Prime Minister.

As to the causes and the circumstances of the dismissal, they would take us beyond the scope of this story; but it may be said here, from such inquiries as the author has been able to make, that neither the Press campaign (as Carson was inclined to suppose) nor (despite the *War Memoirs*) the Prime Minister was the real explanation. Admiral Sims, in his account of Sir Eric Geddes, testifies to qualities which "would have made this stupendous Briton one of the greatest heavyweight prize-fighters in the annals of pugilism." It is possibly too much to suppose that over and above this equipment Geddes was endowed with the modesty which restrained Carson from interfering in matters of which he could hardly be master. Admiral Sims adds that in a very short time Geddes acquired a surprisingly complete grasp of naval problems, and this amateur aptitude may have tempted him to rush into technical or tactical questions which Carson would have left alone. Nor were railways the best training for an office in which high qualities of statesmanship are required. It is not surprising that Lord Balfour noted "a certain incompatibility between the two men," which made conflict between Geddes and Jellicoe inevitable.

Carson had no desire to press these unhappy quarrels, or to inflame exasperations which might endanger the conduct of the war. He intervened merely to do justice to Sir John Jellicoe and possibly also to clear himself of the report, which he hotly resented, that he had approved of or even acquiesced in the change. As for the House of Commons, that much agitated assembly was soon diverted to more peremptory business.

The General Staff, the Commander-in-Chief, had been pressing in vain for reinforcements; in vain they had warned the Government of an impending attack on the Western Front; in vain they had protested against the withdrawal of some of their inadequate forces for those "side-shows" in which the political

mind delighted. On the 7th March, 1918, Mr. Bonar Law, spokesman in such matters for the War Cabinet, had declared that "there will be no dangerous superiority on the Western Front from the point of view of guns any more than from the point of view of men," and added that he was "still a little sceptical about the threatened offensive." So little heed did the Government pay to the warnings of the soldiers that at the critical moment two Cavalry Divisions of the Indian Army were withdrawn from the Fifth Army and were embarking at Marseilles for Palestine when the shock came. On the 21st March had begun that great drive engineered by the genius of General Ludendorff on the weakened British line at its juncture with the French. Against Sir Hubert Gough's Fifth Army of two Brigades and 13 Divisions no less than 42 German Divisions were set in motion, and outnumbered by four to one, with only one man per yard of line, Gough was battered and driven for the space of eight days. Some of his battalions died fighting almost to a man; the rest fell back fighting, gave but never broke; the position was saved almost miraculously by that imperturbable steadiness of the British Infantry under heavy punishment.

The War Cabinet, in a panic, determined to save the country and themselves by a heroic measure of conscription; but it was represented that they could hardly call up Englishmen of fifty and leave Ireland untouched. The Government, then, decided at last to apply conscription to Ireland; but as they trembled for the political consequences of the measure, they proposed to soften it by the establishment of self-government in Ireland "with the least possible delay." From the political point of view, this double policy had the advantage that it put Ulster in a dilemma: to oppose Home Rule would be to oppose Conscription.

It is a probable conjecture that it was in connection with these proposals that "Edward had to go off and see Lloyd George" on the 28th March, 1918, as Lady Carson notes in her Diary. The interview could hardly have been satisfactory to the Prime Minister and the next approach was made by Mr. Bonar Law on the 1st of April:

"The question of Ireland," the Conservative leader wrote, "is nearly hopeless and whatever decision we take there will be



trouble. In these circumstances it would I think be a crime to take any decision without consulting you.

"You may not be able to agree with what we feel compelled to do; but I am sure you ought to know, and I am sure also that you will feel, though out of the Government, as great a responsibility as we.

"When are you returning?" (The Carsons had gone down to Dorset that week-end.) "Probably a final decision cannot be taken till the end of this week; but I do not wish to share the responsibility for any decision till I have discussed it with you."

Carson, as we have seen, had always been in favour of conscription for Ireland, although he well understood the difficulties which had increased usuriously with delay.

Evidently he had discussed the matter with his friend, F. S. Oliver, who wrote to him on the 3rd April:

"Henry Wilson is of opinion that there will be *no* difficulty in absorbing 150,000 or even 200,000 men—even if they are reluctant—without danger in our armies of how many (?) millions fighting on how many (?) fronts.

"As I see it, to get any men worth speaking of we must insist on taking all the men; otherwise the whole thing will peter out in exemptions and compromises and recriminations.

"Further, speaking to you quite seriously and between ourselves, I do not believe that we shall be able to escape defeat against the repeated blows of the German axe unless, between 1st August to November 30th, we are able to put in a great stream of recruits. It will take us all our time—even if Providence showers favours on us—to hold our own until August 1st."

And then in a passage marked "very private" Fred Oliver gave Carson a piece of information:

"The worst thing now is that the Goat [Oliver's pet name for the Prime Minister] is 'wangling' with America—with Wilson and House—to put pressure through Reading against Irish Conscription, giving instead paper promises of (Lord knows!) how many hundred thousand Americans a month! Please keep this close in your bosom, but it is very bad. American promises—at the end of a twelvemonth—have been almost all paper except the dollars; and those they dole out as if we were prodigal sons

instead of a nation which had done something perhaps in reality 'to keep the world safe for democracy.' "

Oliver was less than fair to America, as the event was to show; but what must have more interested Carson was the doubt as to whether the Prime Minister were merely fooling about conscription in Ireland.

Nor were these doubts removed on closer acquaintance.

On the 5th April, 1918, as we gather from Lady Carson's Diary, "Edward dined with Bonar Law and Lloyd George and they talked about Ireland. The Convention is finished and nothing agreed, and Ll. G. is now going to try his hand at settling things. . . . General Gough has been sent home, but I think they are rather having a down on him because Lloyd George doesn't know how else to cover up his fatal mistake of insisting on sending divisions from France to other fronts when the reason we have been pushed back at all is because we had too few men on the Western Front who are now being brought back as fast as possible."

Mr. Lloyd George and Bonar Law must have pressed upon Carson their double policy of Home Rule and conscription for Ireland. How Carson received their proposals may be gathered from the following letter which he wrote to Bonar Law on the 8th April, 1918:

"I have been thinking very anxiously about our conversation on Friday evening and I feel a very definite conviction that the Government will make a great mistake if they mix up the question of conscription with the introduction of Home Rule.

"Apart from the fact that no Home Rule Act ever contemplated leaving such a question to a local Parliament, it seems clear to me that if conscription is made to depend on Home Rule it is a direct invitation to the Nationalist Party to make their demands so extreme that they cannot be entertained. In this way conscription could be entirely defeated. But I think you as leader of the Unionist Party are placing yourself and the whole party in a very dangerous position by consenting to an announcement that you will bring in a Home Rule Bill which is apparently to be passed whether there is consent or not. A Liberal Government might do this and you might merely protest but for our party to do it would I think be disastrous.

Xc

"Moreover I do not believe that you will get conscription with the consent of either Nationalists or Unionists in that way, and there will arise a fierce political agitation. My own clear view is that the Government must make up their minds either that conscription is possible or impossible in Ireland, having regard to the difficulties and results likely to be produced.

"I send you a letter from a Senior Resident Magistrate in Ireland who was at school with me.

"I have been and am very much perplexed over this matter but I feel very confident of the view I have stated."

Despite this advice, the Government persisted, and on the 9th April the Prime Minister announced his policy to the House of Commons. He began with a highly imaginative description of the battle, in which he contrived to insinuate a censure upon General Gough, and then, as far as he was allowed by the yells and groans of the Irish Nationalists, he announced that the Government proposed to extend conscription to Ireland. As there was no machinery and no register, it might take some weeks; but "there must be no delay. As soon as arrangements are complete the Government will, by Order in Council, put the Act into immediate operation." "Meanwhile," he added, when his voice could be heard above the tumult, "we intend to invite Parliament to pass a measure for self-government in Ireland."

The storm, as the Prime Minister no doubt calculated, diverted the House from the Western Front. The Irish broke out in pandemonium against the Government; the Coalition rallied to its defence. "I went down to the House," Lady Carson noted in her Diary, "a long bitter wrangle from the Nationalists about conscription for Ireland and much abuse by them of Edward. . . . I waited until the end and was rewarded by hearing him make the most beautiful little speech that ever was."

Carson, indeed, was brief; his speech was made close upon eleven o'clock. He had always been in favour of equal treatment of Ireland and the rest of the Kingdom: "I ask myself what right have I as an Irish Member to give my adhesion to a Bill which calls for sacrifices of the most terrible and harassing character from the inhabitants of Great Britain and ask that my own part of the United Kingdom should be absolved." What, after all, did their controversies of Unionism and Home Rule

matter compared with the advance of the Germans "over-running with their Prussianism the whole of the civilised nations." The one thing he regretted in the Bill was that the Government should have mixed it up with Home Rule. It had never been suggested that any local Parliament should interfere with the question of defence; but "anyway, let us be honest with each other. Conscription for Ireland is either right or wrong. If it be right it is not propped up by Home Rule. If it be wrong it is no longer propped up by Home Rule. I warn the Government that they may be raising two agitations—one against conscription and a second in regard to Home Rule—both of which may equally affect the operations of the Act which they have in mind."

"All I care about," Carson continued, "is that the country is in danger." He spoke as an Irishman, reminding the Nationalists that they had equal privileges in the United Kingdom. More than equal. "Do not forget," he retorted upon them, "that the other day you passed a Franchise Bill in which you gave two votes to every Irishman for one vote you gave to the Englishman, and is the man with two votes to do nothing to defend them?"

He appealed for the man in the trenches—"the greatest contribution they could make towards an Irish settlement is that the men in the trenches should learn to trust each other." They had taunted him with "Carson's Army." What you call Carson's Army "has just gone into action for the fourth time, and many of them have paid the supreme sacrifice. They have covered themselves with glory, and they have left behind sad homes throughout the small hamlets of Ulster. . . ." They might be "bigoted Orangemen"; but they were fighting for a Catholic country, and in France they attended Catholic worship at a Catholic Church. For his own part he was proud and glad to think that at last his country would take its proper place in the battle for freedom which they were waging.

The Irish Nationalists, nevertheless, voted solid against the Bill.

## CHAPTER XXXVI

### *More Trouble in Ireland*

Conscription in Ulster—And in the South—Carson protests—Home Rule again—  
Reports from Dublin—Bonar Law—In opposition.

CARSON, in his sardonic way, summed-up the prospects of this new policy of Conscription-cum-Home Rule in Ireland. The Nationalists, he said, were not likely to be appeased by the offer of conscription as the price of Home Rule, nor were the Ulster Unionists likely to be reconciled with the offer of Home Rule as the price of conscription. From both sides he heard of gathering trouble. His old friend Fred Crawford, the gun-runner, by that time Colonel in the Army Service Corps, wrote to him from Belfast (on 10th April, 1918), that, if Ulster was to be sold, "our boys at the Front would throw down their arms, the men in the shipyards would throw down their tools and the women working in the linen-factories would walk out." Colonel Wallace, Grand Master of the Orange Order, warned him more at length of what would happen if Home Rule were forced upon Ulster; Dawson Bates wrote to the same effect. There had been (on the steps of the Custom House) an anti-conscription meeting which had been broken up by the Unionists, and the Nationalists had broken up the recruiting-station in the Falls Road: rivets had been flying and the police called out. "We warmly approve of conscription for Ireland," wrote the old Moderator, John Irwin, "but it is heartbreaking to see our men and boys going into the recruiting offices while their places are sure enough to be taken by Sinn Feiners. We greatly fear that if the Conscription Bill passes, tribunals in the South and West will relieve everybody except Protestants." And R. J. Lynn, editor of the *Northern Whig*, supported the testimony of the others: "In the shipyards they are thirsting to drive out every Roman Catholic and if there is any chance of a Home Rule Bill becoming law nothing on earth will prevent them from carrying out their threat. That

would be the prelude to a terrible religious war worse than anything this country has ever experienced."

They were all afraid, these correspondents, that "the rank and file would take matters into their own hands"; but they had confidence in their leader; they would obey instructions and keep calm. "To sum up," said Dawson Bates, "our people are willing to wait, trusting in you to do your best for them."

Carson on his side exhorted them to patience, and to accept conscription when the Bill was passed. They were bound to accept it, he said in the House of Commons,<sup>1</sup> because they had equal and similar rights with all other citizens of the United Kingdom. If those rights were taken away, then an entirely different question arose; but he would still support it, even if as an Irishman he was put under a subordinate Government, "even if you put me under Sinn Feiners": "I support it because I would prefer anything than that the whole principle of civilisation and progress should be impeded by the victory of our enemies who are trying to make a world-domination by the sword."

But did the Government really intend conscription in Ireland? Carson had good reason to doubt it. On the very day that the Prime Minister announced his policy the Roman Catholic bishops in Ireland met under Cardinal Logue to organise resistance to what they called "an oppressive and inhuman law, which the Irish people have the right to resist by all the means that are consonant with the law of God," and they drew up a form of pledge to resist conscription, directing it to be administered by the priests after Mass to all the faithful. The Government blenched:

"We have been threatened," said Mr. Barnes on behalf of the War Cabinet—"I will not use the word threatened—but a prophecy has been made about men shooting from their doorsteps. We have been told of terrible things which will happen in Ireland. Might I ask Irishmen not to cry before they are hurt? Might I suggest to them that they should not start shooting before they are shot at? After all, a great deal of water will have to flow through the bridges before this particular clause can be put into operation." And he added that Home Rule might be

<sup>1</sup> On 16th April, 1918. Parl. Deb., vol. cv., cc. 318 *et seq.*

put upon the Statute Book before the clause was operative.

"It is now perfectly clear," said Carson, after cross-examining Mr. Barnes, "that no recruits in Ireland are to be conscripted until a Home Rule Bill is passed by this Government. . . . That is, the handing over of Ulster is the price to be paid for conscription. . . . When the Bill is passed will hon. members opposite withdraw their objection to conscription? They have not said so." There would then be a Government in Ireland, as well as a people, opposed to conscription, which would make it not easier to enforce but more difficult.

Carson's ruling consideration, it is plain, was the British armies in France, driven back almost to the sea by an apparently victorious enemy, and especially the two Irish divisions—"fighting there for this country, and for their own country, let me say," and "become mere skeletons of the past." "I am ashamed," he exclaimed, "of Ireland that they are skeletons." For that reason he supported conscription. "Those in Ireland who are associated with me are bound to support it," even if they were deprived of what they valued most—"their equal and similar rights with all the other citizens of the United Kingdom." He would support it "even if you put me under a Government of hon. members opposite and those who are associated with them"; he would support it "if you put me under Sinn Feiners, who I believe are a very large and revolutionary party in Ireland." Such was the danger to his country: he supported it because he would prefer anything rather than that civilisation should go down through "the victory of our enemies who are trying to make a world domination by the sword."

The handing over of Ulster was the price to be paid for conscription. "You will ask me, I have no doubt, to go over to Ulster to make things smooth. Well, I do not own Ulster, nor does anybody else." Here Carson gave the House a tragic glimpse of the feeling in Ulster: "As I passed through Belfast a short time ago a woman in the streets roared out, 'I have lost three children, Sir Edward, in the war. Are you going to get Home Rule?' Am I going over to Ulster," he proceeded, "and tell them, because they have acted in that spirit, and have relied on the promise given by a Prime Minister, a Leader of the Opposition and an Act of Parliament, that all that is to be pushed

aside and, because of their loyalty and because they happen to be quiet at the present time, they are the people to be sacrificed? I hope notwithstanding that they will support this Conscription Bill, and help to carry it out in Ireland; but it is a bitter matter. Make no mistake about it."

Extremes met at that moment. "Nothing," exclaimed Carson, "Ireland—north, south, east and west—has suffered so much in its history as from the broken pledges of British statesmen." "We are agreed," cried Dillon, "at last on one thing."

Carson turned to the future. To get over a momentary difficulty the Government, in the middle of the war, were setting up an Irish Parliament, whether Ulster liked it or not, "without even having consulted the Sinn Fein element," which was not negligible in Ireland. They would have to constitute a Government elected by the people. How would they carry it on?—"If it is opposed by the Sinn Feiners and if it is opposed by Ulster, I do not envy any of the hon. gentlemen opposite who happens to be the Prime Minister of this first Irish Parliament!

"No," he proceeded, "I believe you have blundered from beginning to end on the whole question. . . . You have tried, I suppose, to please everybody and I believe in the long run you will please nobody. But for all that," he concluded, "I say to my friends in Ulster, 'With all seriousness and sadness at the vista which is set before you in having inflicted upon you something you never, at all events, dreamed of during the horrors and miseries of this war—notwithstanding all that, I beseech you to go on as you have been going on in the past to help in the prosecution of the war.'"

Carson could hardly have been consoled by a letter from his friend, Fred Oliver, who, in his enthusiasm for Alexander Hamilton, saw in Federalism a solution for all these ills.

"I think," Oliver wrote (on the 17th), "I can read your heart well enough to know what it cost you to speak as you did last night. I have been reading your words over again just now. . . . Your speech was action. I said that of all people you have the most difficult row to hoe. That is true, but you have made a good beginning. Now we have got to fight for a federal settlement and honestly I think we shall win before we are driven into the last ditch. A friend of ours said to me last night: 'The Ulstermen



might have had any settlement they liked out of the Convention if they would have put it forward. But I believe they can still have what they like if they will follow up their Federal hint.' "

Next day came the announcement of a Committee of ten to draw up the new Home Rule Bill. The names and the size of the Committee a little dashed Oliver's hopes. He feared they might "endeavour to amend the worst Home Rule Bill ever laid before Parliament . . . in order to bring it into harmony with one of the most woolly and inconsequent reports ever submitted . . . by any Convention. . . . Duke, for example, has not only got a very confused mind, but is afraid of his own shadow. . . . I don't think Barnes, with all his virtues, can possibly be any use for actual work. I don't think Curzon will be either. Addison might, I think, be quite useful, if he were used, for he has ideas and a sympathetic mind. But as I see the thing the real hope of getting something out of an over-populated Committee lies in Long getting Austen and Cave together, in which case I think Smuts would be helpful.

"One difficulty is the Secretary Adams, a most excellent friend of mine. Unfortunately, however, his mind refuses to grasp constitutional considerations firmly. He is much too apt to slur over a difficulty and to leave a ragged edge, on the plea that to do the thing tidily would be 'contrary to the spirit of the British Constitution'; but the real reason would be that he is afraid of tackling the difficulty."

And Oliver went on to urge Carson to write to Walter Long, putting such "absolutely essential points" as the reservation of unallotted powers and exclusive authority in the Federal Government for all matters of Defence, reservation of Customs and Excise and "securities for application of Federalism all round."

Carson must have smiled grimly as he read these and other such letters. With Ireland on the edge of revolution to try Federalism upon her was like pouring a bottle of rose-water into the crater of a volcano. He could not share his friend's hopes, even if he smiled indulgently on his efforts. "Mr. and Mrs. F. S. Oliver came to dinner," Lady Carson notes in her Diary under 23rd April, 1918. "He, of course, is a Home Ruler,

but a Federal one and is so honest about it; he sends Edward a copy of all the letters he writes about it, and does nothing behind his back like the rest."

Carson had no illusions about Ireland. After the debate on the 17th April, the Nationalists had marched out of the House of Commons and established themselves in Dublin, working with Sinn Fein against the British Government. On the 23rd April the Transport Workers' Union carried out a "lightning strike" in every part of Ireland, save Ulster, as a protest against conscription. Writing that night from Dublin, Carson's friend, Fetherstonhaugh,<sup>1</sup> gave a terrible account of the state of Ireland.

"You are the only prominent politician in whom I have confidence. I can't help writing to you, what I suppose you know already, that belated conscription here is leading to certain disaster. We have had big political movements here before; but nothing to touch this anti-conscription agitation. The Roman Catholic Church has united with the Dillonites and Sinn Fein and I fear that many hitherto Unionists or not interested in politics are in it too. What makes it to my mind so deadly is its quiet. There is little fuss or stir. Only on Saturday they decided for a trial General Strike and we have it to-day (23rd April, 1918) in a perfection I never conceived possible. Dublin is like a city of the dead and I suppose a great part of Ireland—no trains, not a cab or vehicle of any sort on the streets, no milk, no gas, no electric light, no bread, no newspapers, no post, shops shut and even domestic servants in many cases ordered to leave for the day. . . . This Strike was organised beyond anything I ever knew . . . no notices or posters about, merely announcements in the newspapers and private orders and I suppose priming at Mass on Sunday. . . . As this is first day of Punchestown many people will be nicely stranded. . . .

"I am afraid the forces of disorder are now omnipotent over here. For the Government now to go on or back seems about equally likely to lead to disorder."

The Attorney-General in Ireland, Arthur W. Samuels,<sup>2</sup> writing

<sup>1</sup> The late Godfrey Fetherstonhaugh, K.C., for some time Member of Parliament for Fermanagh.

<sup>2</sup> Arthur Warrant Samuels, afterwards on the Bench, died 1922.

a few days later from the Law Room of Dublin Castle, was even more emphatic. The Government had not consulted him; he was completely in the dark as to their policy. They had given him no idea of the Conscription Bill or when they intended to bring it into operation. ". . . No one in the Castle knows the position at present. . . . There is no doubt whatever the Sinn Fein and Irish Party would reject any Home Rule Bill the Government proposed." He was glad he had not been on the Drafting Committee, as in that case he must have resigned. It was sheer madness to go on with it, as the country was reeking with treason. The priests were ordering the people to shoot down the soldiers and police and they could not even be bound over to keep the peace or arrested in default of sureties being given. The Police Force would be broken up if any attempt were made to enforce conscription or to arrest priests for urging men to desert and telling the people to assassinate the police.

He had sent the Prime Minister a memorandum: to bring the Army Act into force, proclaim the Sinn Fein organisation, deport the leaders, stamp down the seditious Press, leave conscription in abeyance, leave Home Rule over until after the war; and put the whole thing on the basis of the German connection with Sinn Fein which is demonstrable. There might be a joint Standing Committee of Irish peers and commoners to deal with Irish legislation pending the war and to advise the Lord Lieutenant and Chief Secretary. But—"the temper of the country is so furious, led by the priests, that words cannot express it."

That Carson took substantially the same view of the situation as these Dublin friends may be gathered from the following letter, of the 27th April, 1918, to Bonar Law:

"DEAR BONAR LAW,—I suppose the Government are getting all the information as to the state of Ireland. I am informed that they have lately procured evidence that the Sinn Feiners are co-operating even now with Germany, and from other sources which are reliable I learn of open deeds of violence by the Sinn Fein without any effort to put them down.

"Now under these conditions, and at a moment when the

Roman Catholic prelates are claiming the right to lay down when the people are entitled to resist the Imperial Parliament, it must be quite evident that the very slightest provocation will lead to a religious war in the North. It is also becoming clear that the Government are not going to enforce Conscription until Home Rule is set up (see Barnes's interview and *Daily Chronicle*). Now it will *not* be possible once Home Rule is set on foot to enforce Conscription, if the Home Rule Government is opposed to it. Can you imprison or otherwise punish a Government which you have just set up? Or can you punish men for disobeying the order to join, and leave those who have organised opposition unpunished?

"Surely you and the Unionist Party are not under these circumstances going to be party to a Bill imposing Home Rule in Ulster.

"I implore of you not to do so for you will gain nothing but disaster from such a course and not a man to fight.

"It is easy to put us in a dilemma and try to make out we are unpatriotic in opposing Home Rule; but after smashing the Party (which matters little) and breaking every solemn pledge, time will show how fatal such a policy is. I am,

"Yours sincerely,

"EDWARD CARSON.

"I do not mark this confidential as I may desire to publish it."

To this the Conservative Leader replied as follows:

"*Confidential.*

11, Downing Street.

"28th April, 1918.

"MY DEAR CARSON,—Your letter, if it is to be published, must be the beginning of conflict between us, and my reply, if for publication, must be of the same kind.

"That may be inevitable; but I should like to delay it as long as possible. I propose, therefore, to write a reply now and to be ready to send it to you when you wish to publish your letter and let me know your wishes.

"In the meantime, as regards evidence about Sinn Feiners'

relations with Germany we have nothing, I am told, which would be proof in a Court of Law.

"Middleton thought the Irish Office had evidence but Duke tells me they have nothing except what comes from Hull and which I am told is not proof. If there were evidence which could be tested in Court we should take action at once for every reason.

"As regards violence our information is that the military under French are ready to put down all disorder and that so far there has been little of it; but we are to see French tomorrow after his return from Ireland.

"Our policy as to the connection between Home Rule and Conscription is as stated by the Prime Minister. We have agreed to nothing else. In the meantime until we have seen the proposed Bill and are agreed about it there is nothing I think to be done by us.

"Yours sincerely,

"A. BONAR LAW."

That the new Irish policy of Bonar Law must dislocate his party there were already indications. A group of Conservatives, bitten like Oliver by Federalism, were agitating in the Press and circulating the party on the subject. Carson's staunch old friend Rupert Gwynne replied to Amery's circular on the subject: "In answer to your circular note *re* a proposed Federal Scheme it would make little or no difference to me if the Government brought forward a Bill which they stated would eventually be applied to the rest of the United Kingdom, as I should not have the least confidence in any promise they gave, nor in any statement they made." He could not have thought it possible, he added, that a combination whom he had taken to be men of their word "could have been led into being so thoroughly unscrupulous in regard to definite pledges given." Conservatives who thought with Rupert Gwynne—and there were many—looked to Carson for a lead. Carson, indeed, was reluctant at such a crisis to do anything which might divide the country or weaken the Government; but his speeches in the House gathered strength as it became more clear that the Government were using conscription merely as a cloak for Home Rule.

We see here, indeed, the beginnings of that widening fissure in the Conservative Party which was in the end to bring down the Coalition. Thus on the 8th May, 1918, we find Carson protesting (in *The Times*) "against the revival of the Home Rule controversy as rending asunder the Unionist Party, this main support of the Government." The action, he went on to point out, of Nationalists, Sinn Fein and the Catholic hierarchy had demonstrated how useless Imperial reservations and paper safeguards must be in any Irish settlement. He pointed also to the statements of Mr. Barnes and the appointment of Mr. Shortt (who had opposed conscription for Ireland) as Chief Secretary as evidence that the Government were not sincere in their intentions. "Do the Government really contemplate," he asked scornfully, "that after setting up an Irish Government opposed to Conscription their first act will be to fall foul of a Government of their own creation?"

Moreover, "the Government have the clearest information in their possession that the Sinn Fein organisation is and has been in alliance with Germany." Had they calculated what part that organisation would play in any Irish Government? Where then was the benefit to the prosecution of the war, which was and must be the ruling consideration?

Loyal Ulster was calm because it did not believe that Mr. Bonar Law and Mr. Walter Long would ever be a party to the breach of specific pledges; but let them not mistake her calm for weakness. He appealed to the Unionist Members of the Government to reconsider the matter before they were led into a fratricidal conflict at a time when their energies should be devoted to the prosecution of the war.

Thus these loyalties which guided his life were forcing Carson more and more into opposition to that Government of which he had so recently been a member.

## CHAPTER XXXVII

### *Dark Days*

An unfortunate dinner - General Maurice's letter - Carson's threat - Oliver's advice - Story of a birthplace - Carson relents - Despondency - The German plot - The Government strikes - Lord French - Carson recovers - Master of the House.

UPON his mother's side Carson was a Lambert: the Cromwellian strain may have cursed him with his fits of gloom and dowered him also with his tenacity in fighting for an idea or a cause. His speeches in the dark days of 1918 suggest this grim determination. "Stick it out to the end," he said to the people of Dover on the 9th of March, "even if this war goes on for one or two or three years."

In the House of Commons he was again the vigilant and independent critic and his comments on the policy of the War Cabinet did not tend to reconcile him with his former colleagues. "Edward," Lady Carson notes in her Diary under the 23rd April, 1918, "dined with Mr. Dawson and the usual men; but Lloyd George had invited himself only a little while before dinner, and he and Edward had a regular set-to, and Edward told him he had no intention of enforcing conscription; but would take a few peaceful Protestants and leave all the R.C.s, and L. G. blustered a bit but all to no purpose. He told Edward he would much rather he voted against him than spoke against him." According to Colonel Repington's account of this unfortunate dinner, the conversation ranged over other topics hardly less painful: "L. G. went at Carson for his speech about Jellicoe, and Carson . . . claimed the right to speak upon a question which he understood and knew all about."<sup>1</sup>

Nor were these two reconciled by the controversy over the resignation of General Trenchard. The Prime Minister, possibly with a distant aim at influence in the Press, had taken both Lord Northcliffe and Lord Rothermere into his Ministry. The

<sup>1</sup> *The First World War, 1914-1918*, vol. ii., p. 284.

latter as Secretary of State for Air had a sharp difference with the Chief of the Staff of the Royal Air Force, with the result that first the Officer and then the Minister resigned. In the debate which followed we find Carson drawing a parallel between the cases of Sir Hugh Trenchard and Sir John Jellicoe. He was glad that as a result of the debate the Government had promised to restore the soldier to employment; a similar promise had been made in regard to Jellicoe four or five months since; "but the last we heard about him was that he was hanging pictures in his private house."<sup>1</sup>

There was another matter upon which Carson felt strongly. Sir Frederick Maurice, who had been Director of Military Operations, wrote a letter to the Press contradicting the statements of Ministers as to the strength of the troops on the Western Front. The figures were critical, since they had been cited by the Prime Minister in his defence of the Government on the retreat of the Fifth Army, and aroused a storm of controversy, some attacking General Maurice on the score of discipline, others the Prime Minister on the score of truth. "Heard from Edward," Lady Carson notes in her Diary under 8th May, 1918, "that General Maurice's letter has made a great stir. Edward always knew that L. G.'s and B. L.'s statements were lies, but only knowing so from being in the Cabinet he could not say so."

These observations give point to the questions which Carson put to Mr. Bonar Law on the 7th of May, 1918. The Leader of the House had announced that the Government proposed to invite two of His Majesty's judges to form a Court of Honour to inquire into the charges, and Carson asked if the proceedings were to be public.

"What I desire to ask," he added, "is, Will Cabinet *or ex-Cabinet Ministers* be allowed to state before the judges what transpired in the Cabinet?"

There was a hint of menace in the question; but it came to nothing. Colonel Repington, who met Carson on the 8th at Lady Londonderry's luncheon-table, heard from him that "he had been for three hours with the Unionists to-day, that their hate of Asquith overrides all other considerations, and that

<sup>1</sup> Parl. Deb., H. of C., vol. cv., c. 134 (29th April, 1918).



they will not back him to-morrow in the Maurice debate." Carson added that it would be no use for him to speak as he would have no following.

It may have been so, or, on the other hand, Carson may have found wisdom in the advice of his friend, Fred Oliver, who wrote to him on the 7th of May, 1918:

"I have been reading over again in the daily papers your heckling of our friend Bunner [Bonar Law] last night. You know, just as well as I do myself, when the things you say are things which win my enthusiasm, and when they are the reverse, without my telling you; and therefore there is no good talking about it.

"I have an uncomfortable feeling that we are all getting more and more like half a dozen blackbirds in the corner of a black-currant net: we struggle and fight and raise our pipes; but the strings just draw a bit tighter each minute, and if we wouldn't strangle each other and be strangled ourselves we shall have to moderate our exercise.

"I am not a pessimist. I think seriously that we can have victory still; we shall have to pay for it publicly and privately, but it is still within reach. All the same I have never felt, since the war began, quite as I have felt during the past weeks since March 22nd. We have been and still are on a razor edge, although more than half the world speaks and acts as if we had got safe to shore. Far from it. We may easily find ourselves on the shore; but not in safety.

"I don't see the slightest bit of good to be gained by recrimination. If we begin it there is no end to it, and there is hardly a single man in politics or the service who can't produce a perfectly damning case against his political or service chiefs—if he chooses to do so. For every single one has made mistakes. I content myself with one criticism against one person. I can never, historically speaking, acquit the Goat [Lloyd George], knowing what he knew and feeling what he felt, for not having taken his courage in both hands last October and risked the fate of the Government by putting the two Armies under one command then. I didn't think so at the time; but I do now, and I am positive that history will write down that verdict in letters of fire.

"But where is the good of saying it? The thing was *not* done. This war will take longer to win in consequence. But there is no good raking it up.

"The Goat is not a man; but rather a natural force—the strongest we have got. I have neither liking nor disliking for him, since I know him. He is the most impersonal form of human energy I've met. But I respect him for one thing: he will win the war if he can; and if he can't I don't believe that any man can. Not Squiff, nor Lansdowne, nor Cave, nor Austen, nor anyone. Therefore I want to keep him where he is.

"On the particular issue I honestly believe that Bonar and he are about as close to the truth as you could expect of humanity. You may say in your sardonic way that the case must then be a strange exception! Possibly it is; but I think the facts are as I state them, and that *Maurice is a well-meaning donkey who is braying up the wrong tree.*

. . . . .

"I don't want the Goat to go because I don't want to lose the greatest force of nature available. I don't want him to go because then Milner almost certainly will go too, and he is the best administrator available. So apart from all personal anti-Squiff sentiments I feel justified in hoping cordially that the said Squiff [Mr. Asquith] will burn his old paws most horribly to-morrow.

"This amused me: letter from Tommy in Palestine to his parents in Lancashire—a true story. 'Dear Father and Mother, I am in Bethlehem where Christ was born: I wish to Christ I was in Wigan where *I* was born.' "

Then, in a postscript overlong for quotation, Oliver used more arguments, as for example that, if the Government fell, no other Government would ever conscript Ireland—upon which and all of which arguments Carson must have had his own opinion. Nevertheless, the fact remains that, when the case came up next day in the House of Commons, Carson took a line which must have pleased Oliver more than Repington. He could not conceive anything more ridiculous than submitting to the decision of His Majesty's judges the question whether the Prime Minister was or was not an honourable man. Were they really doing a service to the country and the Alliance by continuing

the debate and getting into a heated atmosphere and a heated controversy? Were they in the middle of the war, on the eve of probably the greatest battle of the war, solemnly to summon up generals to give evidence against our Ministers, and Ministers to give evidence against our generals? He paid his compliments to Mr. Asquith, whom everybody had "always given the credit of acting in an absolutely patriotic way upon every occasion," and appealed to him not to persist in his motion.

Mr. Asquith did persist but was heavily defeated.

It would seem, then, that, if he had so desired, Carson might have shaken, though he could hardly have defeated, the Government. If the opportunity tempted him he resisted it. Mrs. Spender, with feminine intuition, made what was no doubt a shrewd guess at his state of mind. "I too," she wrote to her husband, "was puzzled by Sir Edward's attitude on the Maurice business; but like you I think the want of an alternative is the key. . . . Lloyd George paralysed Maurice's sympathisers by treating it as a vote of censure and so ensuring Asquith's return to power if it went against the Government. If there had been another alternative, one that the country could accept, I think things would have been very different."

But Mrs. Spender adds a hint which might supply us with another key to the mind of Carson at that time. "*I wish*," she said, "Sir Edward had more ambition and more self-confidence." We are apt to think of Carson as a man of iron, unbending, implacable. In reality he was a man of highly strung nerves, who keyed himself up to great efforts and great occasions, who plunged down into gulfs of self-distrust and depression. At that time, moreover, he had reason for his despondency. He had risked his credit upon his judgment of colleagues who had played him false; he had staked everything upon an Administration with which he had quarrelled. There was no help anywhere. In England there was no longer a Unionist Party; in Ireland his cause of Union was in the dust; and on the Western Front the British armies, his beloved Division among them, had been driven back, had been almost destroyed, by a victorious enemy. There were moments when that fine spirit almost touched despair. "Ruby says Sir Edward has come to the conclusion," Mrs. Spender wrote to her husband on the 10th April, 1918,

"that things being so critical, he cannot further oppose Home Rule; but he means to go over to Ulster and say to them that he is not deserting them and never will; but that he begs them to postpone resistance till after the war, and *then* 'we will dig up our rifles.'"

If such thoughts passed through Carson's mind he put them behind him, and indeed the worsening state of Ireland might have served to convince him that political measures were useless. The rebels from the date of their release had never ceased to work to establish a reign of terror. Boycott of the police, ambushes, murders, raids for arms, all suggested impending trouble. Carson's old friends the Southern Unionists plucked up a desperate courage in the face of danger. On the 4th March, 1918, Richard Bagwell published his "Call to Unionists": "In the maintenance of the Legislative Union between Great Britain and Ireland, and in the firm, just, and impartial administration of the law, lies the only hope for the future of our country and the security of His Majesty's Dominions." Carson wrote to support them: "In the present condition of Ireland it is little short of insanity that any Government should reopen the question of Home Rule."

There was a sharp division at that time between the main body of these Southern Unionists and Lord Midleton's party which was thought to have compromised their cause at the Convention; and at a meeting of the Unionist Alliance Lord Midleton and his friends only escaped defeat by adjournment. "Your inspiring message," John Walsh, the devoted secretary, wrote to Carson on 3rd May, 1918, "produced a very salutary effect on the minds of many members of the Council of the Alliance, and helped them to make up their minds in the right way."<sup>1</sup>

By that time Carson had reason to fear another rebellion in Ireland. Thus on the 8th May, 1918, he told Colonel Repington that "the Sinn Feiners have proved to be in correspondence with the Germans, and that the Boches, recently landed from submarines, including one in Galway Bay, have confessed everything."

Rumour reigned supreme, flourishing in the reality of the

<sup>1</sup> i.e. against Lord Midleton.

danger. The Attorney-General and the Commander-in-Chief in Ireland were giving the Government repeated and urgent warnings and Carson supported them in letters to the Prime Minister and Bonar Law. "Sir Edward," Mrs. Spender wrote to her husband on the 29th May, 1918, "is very unhappy. Lloyd George has turned against him completely, and is doing his best, very successfully, to turn everyone else in the Government against him too. . . . If Sir Edward writes to him now on any Irish question, he doesn't even answer. Sir Edward is convinced the Government has no intention of bringing in either Home Rule or Conscription as he always said from the beginning."

Yet at that very moment the Government struck. Lord French was put in the place of Lord Wimborne as Lord Lieutenant; the Unionist Sir James Campbell replaced the Nationalist Sir Ignatius O'Brien as Lord Chancellor; Mr. Shortt succeeded Mr. Duke as Chief Secretary; the police pounced on the ringleaders. De Valera, Arthur Griffith, Herbert Mellowes, Count Plunkett and Countess Markievicz, 150 all told, were deported; on the 25th May the Government published evidence—"very lame," Colonel Repington described it—of a German plot.

"Sir Bryan Mahon," Mrs. Spender wrote, "was dining with the Carsons last night (29th May) so they heard all about it from him. . . . Lord French is at his old double game. He told Sir Bryan Mahon (who commanded the forces in Ireland) that he couldn't possibly do without him, and refused to take office unless he remained on; and then told the Government that he must go. Sir Bryan had reported the exact facts about the Irish conspiracy, on the strength of which the Irish have now been arrested, six months ago, and the Government would take no action. And now Lord French is supposed to have discovered them in one day by a flash of genius."

An indulgent destiny had given the British Government one more chance of saving the Union—and Ireland. With the rebels taken by surprise and their ringleaders out of the country, the people would have acquiesced in the restoration of a resolute Administration. But even in that moment of vigour the Government had not the courage to make an end of the matter in the only way in which there was any hope of ending it—by the repeal of the fatal Act. Mr. Shortt was himself a Liberal Home

Ruler; Lord French, upon his advice, waived conscription and issued an appeal for 150,000 Irish Volunteers, on the promise of land at the end of their service. Sir Horace Plunkett was put at the head of a propaganda to counter Sinn Féin; and the Government still took the line which invited defeat, the offer of a form of Home Rule which nobody wanted, the promise of an eventual withdrawal of British power from Ireland.

On the 25th June, 1918, the Chief Secretary justified this mixed policy in the House of Commons. His account of the German plot was somewhat sketchy; but there was no doubt at least of the veracity of his description of the state of Ireland—"a recrudescence of drilling, seditious speaking, outrage, midnight raids for arms, and of all the disorder which entirely unfits any country for a peaceful settlement of any of their domestic questions." Nevertheless, he concluded, "I stand here to-day as an unrepentant Home Ruler": he believed that it was "perfectly possible to settle that vexed question . . . within the near future."

Carson had been prostrate that morning with pain, gloom, depression: he rose and at once was master of himself—and the House. He began quietly, after his manner, congratulating Mr. Shortt on his first appearance in the office of Chief Secretary: "One thing I think I may predict of my right hon. friend—that he certainly cannot do worse than his two predecessors." Then he turned to the Irish policy of the Government, the double policy of Home Rule and conscription—"lovely and pleasant in their lives, and in their death they were not divided." He was willing to recognise that his right hon. friend (Mr. Bonar Law) had taken great personal and political risks in adopting that policy: he had broken the party truce, he had shattered the foundations of the Unionist Party; he had gone back on many pledges. He had done it in the interest of the war, "because he felt that it was men, men, men, at any cost." But—"I think that you ought to have made up your mind that having once taken that course you would go through with it."

Then he touched with pride upon the record of Ulster: hardly a public body—even the much despised Orange Lodges, the Protestant Churches at their Synods—but had all in Ulster passed resolutions urging the Government to apply conscription.

But the Catholic bishops had taken the opposite view, "so, having put us into conflict one with another, you are then driven afterwards to withdraw your conscription."

Here the Prime Minister ventured a denial. "Why," Carson retorted, "has conscription not been gone on with if it is not withdrawn?"

Lord Curzon had given in the House of Lords the reason for abandoning conscription.

Here the Prime Minister interrupted again: "He did not say that."

Carson read the passage as "a good example of composition," mimicking Curzon's pomp of style: "'I will not say to abandon the policy; I will not say to change the front; it was our duty to recognise the facts of the case and adjust our policy. . . .'"

And Carson went on to quote Lord Curzon's reasons for the "adjustment." "The Roman Catholic clergy," Lord Curzon had said, "threw down a direct challenge to Imperial supremacy. . . . They advised their flocks, under penalties of eternal damnation, to resist conscription to the uttermost."

So, said Carson, the policy was "adjusted." The Government had been challenged by the Roman Catholic hierarchy—"I do not think I have ever mentioned them in this House before"—on a question involving Imperial supremacy and it had been beaten by the Church.

"I am inclined to think that the action which the Government have taken is probably right, because, in the midst of a war such as we are waging, it is not worth while bothering about Ireland, if you have to go through all this indignity and all this humiliation, if you are to be crawling upon your knees to the clergy of a particular Church that you may vindicate those who are lying in their graves in defence of liberty on the field of battle."

Here Carson was interrupted by such cheers as are seldom heard in the House of Commons, and he was quick to draw the moral:

"We have always told you that your reservations and your safeguards were not worth the paper they were written upon, and if the reservations as regards the defence of our country could not be carried out by the whole might of this Empire,

where are the reservations for the political and religious freedom of those who differ from these men ? ”

As for Home Rule, the Government pretended that the whole situation had been changed by the discovery of a plot in the month of May 1918. He reminded them of another German plot in 1916. However, whether the reason was novel or stale, the new Home Rule Bill was to be abandoned—“ at least for the present.” To proceed with it in the circumstances, Lord Curzon had said, “ would almost amount to a crime,” but Mr. Shortt would introduce it later “ as a virtue.”

“ Does it not occur to my right hon. friend,” asked Carson, “ that, during the war, we have really bothered ourselves enough about Ireland ? ”

Needless to follow the speech further. It was a triumph for Carson, who no doubt reflected that once more, at its darkest hour, his cause had been saved by the extreme courses of its enemies.



## CHAPTER XXXVIII

### *End of the War*

Ulster Rifles - Victory at last - The League of Nations - Lord Northcliffe -  
Trinity College - Duncairn - The elections.

ON the 12th of July, 1918, Carson made what his wife called "a most wonderful speech" to some eighty thousand of his old friends the Orangemen at Finaghey, near Belfast. Nothing, he said, had more disgusted him with the filth of politics than to find men going back on their word to those who had given their lives to the British cause. "They all cheered him . . . we could hardly get out of the field."

His words suggest that Carson was on his guard. There was a hint of trouble in the House of Commons on the 29th of July, when John Dillon brought in a motion on British policy in Ireland. The animus of the speech was concentrated on Carson, with particular reference to the "German guns and rifles" which he had refused to hand over for the service of his country at the outbreak of the war.

Carson had not long to wait for the next move. The Chief Secretary, on the pretext of disarming Ireland, went to Belfast and demanded the rifles of the Ulster Volunteer Force. The Ulstermen protested that the rifles were in loyal hands, that they were a guarantee against rebellion and that to seize them would be to precipitate superfluous trouble; but to no purpose. "Mr. Shortt pointed out," Dawson Bates wrote to Carson, "that it was absolutely necessary, having regard to the strong resentment against Ulster which existed among the American troops, and the feeling in France and other countries, that Ulster should be completely disarmed. . . . Better," he said, "a row with all its consequences than that America, France and other Allies should think that Ulster was receiving preferential treatment."

The Ulstermen did not trust Mr. Shortt; they suspected that he was acting at the instigation of the Nationalists, who in their

turn were carrying out the policy of Sinn Fein, with the object of disarming the Unionists of the North. Therefore they wrote urgently to Carson, begging him to explain things to the Government. "As there is an election coming on, they will listen to you."

Thus prompted, Carson wrote to Bonar Law. "Since the war began," Carson explained, "these arms had been held at the disposal of the Government; they had been used for quelling the Sinn Fein Rebellion; . . . whatever may be thought of the policy which brought them to Ireland before the war, no one has ever suggested that they had been used at any time to aid the enemy.

"These rifles have been stored in places well known to the police; there has been no secrecy about their location, and for the last four years the Government had been well content to leave them, being well assured that there was no danger of their falling into dangerous hands.

"The Lord Lieutenant appears wisely to hold that the rifles may continue in their existing armouries, subject to military control. Mr. Shortt, on the other hand, insists that they be removed to actual Government custody. If, in order to placate Nationalist animosity, the Chief Secretary proceeds to enforce such a seizure and removal of the arms I anticipate the creation of a state of feeling that may lead to very deplorable results. . . ."

Mr. Bonar Law was sympathetic and conciliatory.

"Lloyd George is away to-day," he wrote on 2nd September, 1918, "and will be here to-morrow and I have arranged that a messenger . . . be sent to Dublin in his name to ask that nothing be done about the Ulster arms till he has an opportunity of discussing it with French and Shortt.

"I shall take it up with L. G. to-morrow and I feel sure that he will be anxious to see you about it before any decision is taken."

Then Bonar Law turned to matters of more importance. "I want," he wrote, "before any decision is taken about an election, to have a talk with you about the whole position, so if you are to be in London at any time please let me know and if you have to come up about the arms question we can meet then."

On the 8th, Bonar Law wrote again: "L. G., at my suggestion,

telegraphed to French privately the substance of your idea and he got back a reply that they were satisfied the subject was being dealt with on these lines. I saw the message and it was a very definite hint to the P.M. that he ought not to interfere. In these circumstances, as we have been acting on the principle of leaving the new Irish Government to govern, I do not feel I ought to do more.

"As regards the general situation, I do not want you to come specially to see me; but if any decision has to be taken I shall let you know."

From the mass of correspondence which followed we gather that Mr. Shortt was inclined to be obstinate and even hinted at resignation; but that Lord French agreeing with Carson, the Ulstermen were allowed to keep their rifles in their own armouries, subject to military supervision.

In the meantime the war was drawing to its appointed end. The faith of the Commander-in-Chief that victory would at last be won on the Western Front, was proving itself to be right after all. "Haig," Lady Carson notes on the 8th August, 1918, "has begun an offensive with some of our troops and some French, and it seems to be the most wonderful success as far as it has gone." Again on the 10th: "The news from France even better: we have taken 24,000 prisoners and 300 guns, and the Germans are going right back." The end was near. "I have often thought," Fred Oliver wrote to Carson on the 29th September, "during these remarkable ten weeks, of what you were always saying in Dec., Jan., and Feb., last—'That then was the time for the Germans to offer a generous peace, and if they didn't they might regret it when some unforeseen developments put their apparently triumphant case into Queer Street.' Yes, that is a thing to remember."

Carson's mind at that time, as we gather from his papers and speeches, was greatly occupied with the problems of peace. As a member of the War Cabinet, he had been chairman of the Economic Offensive Committee which had worked out the bases of national policy after the war, and had proposed, as part of the scheme, to denounce all commercial treaties. These ambitious plans, although largely accepted by the Cabinet, had been laid aside when Carson resigned; but Carson himself continued

to work for them in co-operation with a group of members of his own way of thinking in the House of Commons and with certain organisations of merchants and manufacturers outside. The general aim was a "well-founded dependence": Carson desired to see his country better prepared for peace than she had been for war. He insisted on the need to secure raw material equal to the needs of British industry; of the need to maintain the new standards of life and wages established in war and to find employment for our returning soldiers. As chairman of the Aliens' Watch Committee he supported the claim of the British-born to the birthright of his nationality, and worked to strengthen the British Nationality and Status of Aliens Bill. He denounced the laxity which had permitted the alien—even the enemy—to insinuate himself into public offices and business, even to enter the Privy Council. "Nothing will persuade me," he said, "that if I had been twenty years in Germany, I would not have had exactly the same feelings towards this country as I have now. I believe you cannot get it out of your blood. It is there. It has come down from century to century. . . ."<sup>1</sup>

Carson, moreover, worked for justice for the fighting forces. While at the Admiralty he had helped to prepare the Naval Prize Bill. "The one thing I was determined," he explained, "was that no privilege that they had had hitherto should be in the slightest degree infringed upon, and that the fund to be distributed by the new Tribunal should be the fullest possible substitute for the old Prize Fund."<sup>2</sup>

"The *Daily Mail*," Lady Carson noted in her Diary on 18th October, 1918, "came to interview Edward on peace, and he told them we ought to insist on holding the Kiel Canal while we were discussing it, and that the German generals should deliver up their swords to Haig and Foch and our troops should occupy Berlin." On the 24th in the Sheldonian Theatre at Oxford, he exhorted his countrymen to "stick out the last half-mile."

Then peace came. "Walked with Edward to the House of Commons," Lady Carson wrote on the 28th, "and came back in the Underground. It was packed, everyone talking about the war and all perfectly calm and satisfied; but no excitement

<sup>1</sup> H. of C., 19th July, 1918.

<sup>2</sup> H. of C., 23rd July, 1918.

or boasting. We really are a great nation and I am proud to be one of them." Again on the 8th November: "Edward and I lunched at Prince's: such fun and pre-war feeling. . . . The whole of the Mall is full of guns we have captured: a double row down each side and throngs of people looking at them." Then the 11th November: "The Armistice signed at 5 this morning; firing stopped at 11. . . . The depot [of the Ulster Division] all went down to Buckingham Palace when the maroons went at 11 and there was an enormous crowd, and we sang and cheered and cried with joy. Dolly, Lady Salisbury, the Beauchamps and all sorts of unusual people. The King, Queen, Duke of Connaught, and Princess Mary came out on the balcony. Wild cheers. To Cannon Street Hotel. Edward made a wonderful speech. To H. of C., arrived half-way through L. G.'s statement; then to St. Margaret's, both the Houses in procession—back to tea with Lady Keppel. Home. Early dinner with Mrs. Spender (Ed. dined out) and by Tube to Piccadilly Circus. Great crowds, bright street lamps and all cheering and singing and laughing. Every one happy, and so quiet and well behaved. Home by 11 and the end of the greatest day we shall ever see."

The speech at the Cannon Street Hotel was made to the British Empire Producers Organisation. Carson spoke chiefly of the gratitude they owed to the men who had fought; how they should be rewarded; he spoke also in sorrow for those who had died in the fight; of the need to build up again what had been broken down; of the danger that peace abroad might be the beginning of strife at home. He spoke too of hopeful schemes of avoiding wars in the future.

"There was," he said, "a simple proposition which each man could place before himself when a scheme for a League of Nations was produced. He could ask himself—'Am I prepared on such a scheme as this to give up, with all its traditions, and all that it has done for us, the British Navy?'"

"When you have arrived at a scheme which enables you to put your hand on your heart and say you would be safe without the British Navy, then, indeed, you will have evolved a scheme for the League of Nations. God bless the British Navy."

And these good merchants of Mincing Lane cheered Carson

to the echo, with another cheer when he added, "God bless the Army!"

Approaching peace gave the politician his opportunity. Mr. Lloyd George proposed to reap the popular harvest of these arduous victories in the field and his Conservative colleagues paid Carson the compliment of consulting him on the appeal to the country.

"MY DEAR CARSON"—Bonar Law wrote on the 29th October, 1918—"After a talk with L. G. yesterday afternoon, I dictated a very rough draft of the minimum it would be possible for me to say in a speech on economic policy on lines of agreement with him.

"I think you will agree with it for it is really very much your own draft; but I should be obliged if you would go over it and tell me whether you think it is enough to carry our party with us through an election.

"Yours sincerely,

"A. BONAR LAW."

On the 2nd November, 1918, the Prime Minister wrote a letter to Bonar Law for publication in the Press. As to Home Rule he stated two "fundamental facts": (1) That the Home Rule Act was on the Statute Book, and (2) "In accordance with the pledge given by me in the past and indeed by all party leaders, I could support no settlement which could involve forcible coercion of Ulster." As to self-government, "I recognise that in the present condition of Ireland such an attempt could not succeed and that it must be postponed until the condition of Ireland makes it possible."

This letter, although written, had not been published when the Nationalist Party made its last demonstration in Parliament. It was on a motion by T. P. O'Connor that before the Peace Conference the Irish question be settled on the lines laid down by President Wilson, and John Dillon directed all his accumulated fury against Ulster and against Carson. "The real moral of this debate," he shouted, "is that Sir Edward Carson has been acclaimed King of Ireland and the Government obey his orders."

"May I say," Carson drawled, "that this is the tenth year of my reign."

"He has reached to-night the acme of his power," Dillon went on in growing fury. "He used to be obliged to get up and defend himself; but he had no need to do that now, because the Front Bench obeyed him. It is the tenth year of his reign, based upon German rifles and revolution. There would have been no rebellion in 1916 but for Sir Edward Carson and Mr. Bonar Law. . . ."

Such was the dying speech of Irish Nationalism in the British House of Commons. On the 21st November, 1918, Parliament was prorogued, and Lloyd George and Bonar Law in a joint manifesto stated among other things their Irish policy: ". . . We regard it as one of the first obligations of British statesmanship to explore all practical paths towards a settlement of this grave and difficult question on the basis of self-government."

There were, however, "two paths which are closed—the one leading to the complete severance of Ireland from the British Empire, and the other the forcible submission of the six counties of north-east Ulster to a Home Rule Parliament against their will." Upon that basis Carson could support the Government.

Mr. Lloyd George was shrewd enough to value the support of the Ulster leader only less than he feared his opposition. Carson had the courage which the Prime Minister lacked, as one curious incident of those times served to show. Mr. Lloyd George had made Lord Northcliffe Director of Propaganda, yet the Northcliffe Press opened an attack on Lord Milner, who had succeeded Lord Derby as Secretary of State for War, and it was left to Carson to defend the Minister.

"I am quite alive to the fact," said Carson, "that it is almost high treason to say a word against Lord Northcliffe. I know his power and that he does not hesitate . . . to try to drive anyone out of office . . . if they incur his royal displeasure. But as at my time of life no office (nor its emoluments) makes the slightest difference, as the only thing I care about is the interests of decent administration, I venture to incur the odium of this great trust-owner, who monopolises in his own person so great a part of the Press of this country and has always a ready-made

cheque to further any policies that he thinks best in his own interests."

As for this particular "man-hunt," Carson declared roundly that Lord Northcliffe desired to drive Lord Milner out of office because he himself wanted to take the War Office or "get himself into the War Cabinet, so that he might go to the Peace Conference."<sup>1</sup>

"I have had a shower of letters," Milner wrote to Carson, "from friends simply delighted with the trouncing you gave Northcliffe. And I certainly think it was high time that somebody other than myself said something, if only to show that there are other people in the world who are not afraid of N. I believe myself that he is only a scarecrow, but still the fact remains that most public men are in terror of him.

"You are never in fear of anybody and you are at all times a most loyal friend. I have known that for so long now that I needed no fresh proof of it. . . ."

With the elections drawing on, Carson had to consider the question of his constituency. He had long represented Dublin University; but the Provost of Trinity, Dr. Mahaffy, had differed with him over the Convention. Moreover, the centre of Carson's interest in the fight for the Union had long since shifted to its last stronghold in the North, so that when his old friend George Clark, of the Belfast Shipyard, wrote to him on behalf of the Executive of the Duncairn Unionist Association, he accepted their invitation. Twelve Fellows and fourteen Professors of Trinity wrote to express their gratitude for his support of that famous college during the twenty-six years he had represented them in Parliament, and he on his side shared their sorrow at the parting.

Thus it was that on the 14th November, 1918, Carson found himself again in Belfast—receiving the old welcome from the old friends. Again they concerted measures together. On behalf of the Ulster Unionists in Council assembled Carson sent to the King a message of loyalty and congratulation. "In these days of rejoicing," His Majesty replied, "I recall the deeds of the 36th (Ulster) Division. . . . Throughout the long years of struggle,

<sup>1</sup> H. of C., 7th November, 1918.



which have now so gloriously ended, the men of Ulster have proved how nobly they fight and die."

Carson, as he often said, represented the only true democracy in Ireland. He was not only president of the Ulster Unionist Council, but of the Ulster Unionist Labour Association, which strongly represented the workmen of the shipbuilding yards, the foundries and the factories. He spoke, indeed, for all classes of that united community, which clung together in that north-eastern corner of Ireland like a little Greek State of old time between mountain and sea.

Carson supported the Coalition, resting on the public pledges of the Prime Minister and Mr. Bonar Law that there would be no coercion of Ulster. But he retained as always his right of criticism, and one of his speeches on the shortcomings of the Government in its treatment of disabled soldiers brought a characteristic letter from the Commander-in-Chief. Writing from General Head Quarters in France, Sir Douglas Haig cordially thanked Carson for taking up the question. He himself had been in correspondence with the War Office on the subject. "Many of us feel the Government by starting the so-called 'King's Fund' are shirking their duty of providing *adequately* for the disabled. We hold that an officer or man who has suffered in his country's cause has a right to be provided for by the State, not by charity." And Haig proceeded to state a case for giving the disabled a proportion of what they had earned before they joined up. The letter suggests the anxious solicitude of the great general for his officers and men.

The Carsons stayed during elections first with the Craigs and then with Sir Thomas and Lady Dixon at Cairndhu, a lovely place over the sea four miles from Larne. There on the 28th December, 1918, they heard the declaration of that famous poll. Carson himself was returned with a majority of over 9,000, and all nine Unionists were in for Belfast. "The Coalitionists are sweeping the country," Lady Carson noted in her Diary. "The *Evening Telegraph* kept on telephoning as the news came in . . . Asquith out, McKenna out, Simon out, Runciman out, in fact nearly all the old gang. . . . It's better and better every day to be British."

In Ireland, Carson led a party of Unionists twenty-six strong;

but all except three were of the North. In the South the Nationalists had almost disappeared; of their sixty-eight seats they only held six. John Dillon was among the fallen, and as for the O'Brienites they were exterminated. Terrorism and impersonation supplied Sinn Féin what they lacked of popularity. Although in the contested elections they polled less than a third of the votes, their victory was complete. The South of Ireland had abandoned itself, or been abandoned, to revolution.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> W. Alison Phillips, *The Revolution in Ireland*, p. 153.

## CHAPTER XXXIX

### *Another Settlement*

The Tilak case – American Irish – At the Mansion House – The Peace of Versailles – Mr. Asquith – Defiance – Home Rule again – Attempt on Lord French – The new plan.

ON the 8th January, 1919, Lady Carson noted in her Diary: "The Prime Minister's Secretary rang up in the evening to ask Edward to go and see him and Bonar Law to-morrow. We suppose it is to offer him something in the new Cabinet, which he says he won't take as he is going back to law." On the 9th this surmise was confirmed: "Lloyd George and Bonar wanted Edward to come into the Cabinet without a portfolio; but he refused. He says he would much rather do law."

There was one law case, tried before Mr. Justice Darling and a special jury, which more than usually interested Carson at that time. The plaintiff, Bal Gangadhar Tilak, was a Mahratta Brahmin of the Bombay Presidency, who complained of certain things which Sir Valentine Chirol had said about him in a book called *Indian Unrest*. Sir John Simon introduced his client as a member of the Indian National Congress, a writer, a political enthusiast, who had indeed gone so far as to justify the assassination of Afzal Khan by the Mahratta chief Shivaji, but that was in 1688, about the date of the Battle of the Boyne.

"Which was not so recent," Carson interjected, "as the Battle of Walthamstow," in which constituency Simon had suffered defeat.

Tilak, Sir John went on to explain, was a politician and an idealist, who held strong views about government and the rights of his country; but then so did other people, and he naturally felt aggrieved when he was accused of instigating murder. The appearance of the plaintiff—elderly, subtle and suave—seemed to justify the good opinion of his counsel. But Carson's cross-examination was damaging: "When did you last

get out of prison?" he began.—"June, 1914," the plaintiff replied.

"Did you take any proceedings in India to vindicate your character?"—"No."

"Was the judge a native of India?"—"Yes."

"Do you remember what the judge said in summing up?" And Carson proceeded to read the judicial description of the articles which Tilak was condemned for writing. "They were seething with sedition; they preached violence; they spoke of murders with approval."

Then Carson read one of Tilak's articles—a rhapsody on the bomb: "Muskets can be taken away by the police; but is it possible to stop or do away with the bomb? . . . The bomb is a form of knowledge; it is a kind of witchcraft; it is a charm, an amulet. . . ."

As Carson proceeded with his cross-examination and traced the connection between Tilak's writings and the murder of Englishmen which followed them, an almost terrifying change was observed to come over the witness. He leaned forward, his face convulsed, his fingers clutching the frame of the witness-box. Carson, as he afterwards said, had an uncomfortable feeling that Tilak was about to spring at his throat. But nothing happened—except that the verdict went to the defendant.

On the 29th May, 1919, a deputation of Carson's old friends, the Southern Unionists, put the case of Ireland before a large meeting of Members of Parliament at the House of Commons. The Republicans, who held no less than 73 of the 105 Irish seats, were working, as the deputation pointed out, with the Transport and General Workers' Union, for a Soviet State in Ireland, and already controlled over a thousand co-operative societies. In the case of organised revolution the Irish Loyalists looked to Parliament to protect their liberties and lives.

Carson, who spoke at the end of the meeting, referred to an intervention which set at naught the efforts of the Irish Government. The Irish (and German) Americans had been conducting a great political campaign in the United States, to the end that Ireland should be separately represented at the Peace Conference. The American Senate supported their demands, and a deputation of Irish-American delegates was received by

President Wilson in Paris. He saw them only to refuse their demands; but Mr. Lloyd George gave them passports to visit Ireland. The results were disastrous. Three American Irishmen, the more truculent for the concession, made a triumphant tour of Ireland, and drew up a report full of the most fantastic lies about English cruelties and Irish sufferings. "What was the reason," Carson asked, "for allowing them to go there and to talk—American citizens—of the deposition of the King and the creation of a Republic? Some people believed that they came having behind them members, high members, of the Government. . . . That was the kind of thing which was weakening the Government and doing harm in Ireland."

Those Irish Unionists pleaded for the extension to Ireland of the full benefits of British law, a policy for which we find Carson in Parliament continually pressing. He pressed especially for better services of health, housing and education, better schools and the better payment of school teachers: "The more we understand the situation in Ireland and the way Ireland is being left behind, the more we realise that it arises from the fact that we have not insisted in sharing the advantages conferred upon Great Britain. . . . I shall make my protest on every occasion. On any Bills which are brought forward discriminating against Ireland I shall try to prevent that discrimination. Any Bills which confer benefits upon the people of England and Scotland which are refused to us, I shall try to thwart until you include Ireland."<sup>1</sup> Carson was as good as his word, whenever he found opportunity, in the two years which followed; but in vain. In one important matter, the Irish Education Bill, which was intended to improve Irish schools and the position of Irish school teachers, he was defeated by the Irish Roman Catholic bishops, who would not brook any interference with their control of education.

It was Carson's alternative to separation—to demonstrate the advantages of the Union. The more he considered the state of Ireland at that time, the less he liked constitutional experiments. "There are worse things than leaving the Irish question where it is," he said in a debate on "Federal Devolution"; "do not meddle with it and make a mess of it, which you are so constantly

<sup>1</sup> Parl. Deb., H. of C., vol. cxvi., c. 1105, 27th May, 1919.

doing; but as far as possible treat it as you treat England and Scotland.”<sup>1</sup>

On the 12th of June, 1919, the City of London paid honour after her custom to those who had served her in war. “We went to Guildhall at 11.30,” Lady Carson noted in her Diary, “your names are shouted very loudly as you walk up the steps on to the dais and shake hands with the Lord Mayor and Lady Mayoress. We were quite early so saw all the others arrive. Edward got a very good clapping. . . . We sat amongst lots of Admirals. Admiral Barrett came and talked to me. I had not seen him since Bermuda. Admirals Sturdee, Madden, Colville, Tothill and lots more were there, and Generals Rawlinson, Bethune, Byng, etc. The swords presented to Haig and Beatty were too lovely. We then went on to luncheon at the Mansion House. . . . About 500. . . . I sat next to Edward and Lord Peel and had General Horne and his wife opposite. I liked both Haig’s speeches better than Beatty’s though they were not so polished, but so honest and straight. The Guildhall looked so lovely with all the colours of the different city robes and the banners hanging from the roof, and the sun streaming through a window in the roof, and it was so splendid to see so many brave and wonderful men and I always like a London crowd.”

Thus Lady Carson, whose simple notes bring back those glorious occasions.

Next day, “we went to St. Paul’s for the Navy Memorial Service which was most beautiful and just what sailors would love. It wasn’t even sad but a sort of triumphant service of thanks given for brave men. They are the most glorious set of men in the world. I am sure there are no men in our nation even to touch the sailors.”

On the 18th of June, Carson spoke at a farewell luncheon to his good friend “Billy” Hughes, who was returning to Australia, after holding his own at Versailles. On the 27th the Carsons went to a famous garden party at Buckingham Palace: “There was an awful crowd, the poor King and Queen were simply mobbed, and we never got near them at all; but saw lots of friends and ate strawberries.” Then on the 28th of June, 1919, “the guns fired about 5 p.m. to say that peace with Germany had been

<sup>1</sup> Parl. Deb., H. of C., vol. cxvi., c. 1899.

signed." Lady Carson "walked up to Hyde Park Corner; but there didn't seem to be much excitement, and I heard some soldiers say Germany couldn't be trusted. Edward made a speech for the Serbians at their headquarters, it being Kosovo Day, their great festival. He made a most splendid speech and they were all delighted, and the little Yovanovitch girl gave me a most lovely bouquet of carnations. We drove up afterwards and sat in the Park to get some air. . . ."

On the 3rd of July, 1919, the Prime Minister reported the Peace of Versailles to the House of Commons. There was no trace of past or hint of future differences in the eulogy which Carson pronounced on Mr. Lloyd George upon that occasion. "I had the honour," he said, "of serving in the Cabinet with him in the very darkest days of our country's history. His patriotism, his courage and his genius . . . were the greatest contribution that any man in the whole country has given to the war . . . and history will say of him that he did more than any other man to preserve the liberties of the world."

Carson, always magnanimous, was kindly in retrospect. He went on to speak of the burden borne in the early days of the war by Mr. Asquith, who had had very great difficulties to contend with in bringing the nation to a full sense of its obligations. ". . . He suffered a personal loss, and when he went to the other side of the House, when he left the Government, he showed an example of patriotism which many . . . might copy."<sup>1</sup>

This tribute, the only reference to Mr. Asquith in that debate, deeply touched the fallen statesman, who found, in the kindness of an old enemy, consolation for the neglect of old friends.

Sinn Fein crept like an assassin close upon the back of these triumphant rituals. In that year some twenty policemen were murdered, some of them in broad day in the crowded streets of Cork and Dublin, whose citizens dared not lay a hand upon the criminals, and countless outrages were committed upon the returning soldiers and the Loyalists. Sinn Fein found a new and surprising ally. "I know perfectly well," Carson had said in his brush with Northcliffe, "the reward you reap for criticising the Press. Thank God I never cared what they said about me." He was, however, to be touched in something he held dearer than

<sup>1</sup> Parl. Deb., H. of C., vol. cxvii., cc. 1288-4.

self. In a message to Captain Alcock on his trans-Atlantic flight, Lord Northcliffe referred to "the future . . . Dominion of Ireland," and followed up this declaration of a change of policy by a series of articles in which *The Times* made a case for Home Rule and attacked both Carson and Ulster. With *The Times* went the whole stream of the Northcliffe Press, and many of the cock-boats of politics swung round on their anchorage at this turn of the tide of popular opinion.

Carson's reply was made in Belfast on the 12th July, 1919, at a great meeting of Orangemen, when he moved this defiant resolution:

"We demand the repeal of the Home Rule Act, which has been repudiated by every party in Ireland, and we confidently assert that Parliamentary Union is essential for the preservation of our liberties and for the security of the British Empire."

"There are," said Carson, "only two policies before the country—one is maintenance of the Union and loyalty to the King, and the other is—God bless the mark!—an Irish Republic, an Irish Republic with your hats off to the President, Mr. de Valera. . . ."

He spoke of the Irishmen who slept their last sleep on the plains of Flanders and France, in Mesopotamia, in Palestine, in the Balkans and elsewhere—men who had done their share not for the Irish Republic but for the British Empire. Was it to be their reward to give up all that they had won, to be false to all for which they had suffered?

"I tell the British people this . . . here in your presence to-day . . . that if there is any attempt made to take away one jot or tittle of your rights as British citizens and the advantages which have been won in this war of freedom, I will call out the Ulster volunteers."

As for Dominion Home Rule, it was "the camouflage of an Irish Republic." ". . . I send this message to all whom it may concern, as we say in the law, that we will have nothing to do with Dominion Home Rule or any other Home Rule. . . . We tell them we are loyal men, that the Government and the Constitution and the British Empire are good enough for us, and that the man who tries to knock bricks out of the sound and solid foundation, if he comes to Ulster, will know the real feelings of Ulstermen and Ulsterwomen."



This speech greatly shocked the feelings of many respectable people. On the 16th July, 1919, Mr. Clynes moved the adjournment of the House of Commons in order to consider it. Were minor agitators to go to prison while this major incendiary remained at large? Were they to enforce the law against the majority in Ireland while the minority set it at defiance?

Carson was not in the House, and the Government uneasily defended him.

"What about inciting?" shouted Will Thorne.

Lord Hugh Cecil, who was not in the Government, replied that "you must incite to something that is going to happen and not under circumstances that have not yet arisen. . . ."

"They pinched me for inciting, anyhow," Thorne retorted, "and my language was not half so damaging as that of the right hon. gentleman the Member for Duncairn."

The lawyers were equal, as always, to the occasion. Sir Gordon Hewart, the Attorney-General, found that Carson's words were merely "a hypothetical contingent threat," and Mr. Inskip argued that although, indeed, as Mr. Devlin pointed out, the Home Rule Act was on the Statute Book, it was not the law of the land until it became effective. The motion which was in effect a vote of censure on Carson, was defeated by 217 votes to 78.<sup>1</sup>

As the rebellion in Ireland smouldered on, Carson became the more apprehensive of any weakening in the Government policy. "I believe," he said in Belfast on the 2nd September, 1919, at a meeting of the Ulster Unionist Council, "the Cabinet at the present moment are trying to make a settlement, and therefore I am going to talk to them in the most frank possible way. . . . What is a settlement? The Home Rule Act is not a settlement. . . . Can you have a settlement which disregards the views of 75 per cent of the representatives of the country you are going to settle and will not be accepted by the other 25 per cent?"

There was nothing, he went on to point out, in the logic of Sinn Féin, between the Union and Separation. Were the Government to bring in a Bill which nobody wanted and to force it upon Ireland? With bitterness Carson added, "A statesman is a man who, at the proper moment, when it particularly pleases

<sup>1</sup> *Parl. Deb., H. of C., vol. cxviii., cc. 485 et seq., 16th July, 1919.*



THE CARSON MEMORIAL AT STORMONT, IN FRONT OF ULSTER GOVERNMENT BUILDINGS

Lord Northcliffe, betrays every interest entrusted to him." And of himself he said: "Instead of being branded as a rebel . . . I would be called one of the first statesmen of the Empire if I would only agree to surrender the solemn trust that has been given to me by you and the people of Ulster."

It seemed at first as if the Government had taken these warnings to heart. On the 12th September, 1919, the Sinn Fein Parliament was proscribed as a dangerous association; but on the 25th, Lord French was called to a Cabinet meeting, where, it was rumoured, the Government decided once more to attempt a settlement. On the 29th a series of demonstrations for the Union was opened in Belfast. Carson, held up at Penrith by a strike, sent a message to Ulster calling for "the organisation of all our forces," and reaffirming the letter and spirit of the Covenant.

In the early days of October 1919 the Government set up a Cabinet Committee of ten with Walter Long as chairman, to consider the future government of Ireland. In reply, apparently to a letter asking for information, Mr. Bonar Law wrote to Carson:

"*Private.*

11 Downing Street,

"Whitehall, S.W.

"17th October, 1919.

"MY DEAR CARSON,—I am sorry it is quite impossible for me to give any indication as to the time when Home Rule will be discussed in the coming session beyond, of course, the fact that something must be done about the Home Rule Act this session.

"So far all that has been done is to appoint the Committee which was set up not, as the papers implied, to draft a Bill to carry out a policy already decided upon by the Cabinet but in effect to explore the whole ground.

"I shall, of course, wish to talk to you about the position before any decision of any kind is taken; but at present the situation is exactly where it was when I saw you last. I shall at once let you know whenever I am in a position to give you any indication as to the time when it is likely to come before the House.

"Are you to be regularly in Town now ?

"It is evident you cannot come to see me without the fact being in the papers.

"Yours sincerely,

"A. BONAR LAW."

Events were not propitious. Almost every week came news of the murder of a policeman or an attack by a gang of armed men on some railway station or police barracks. On the 11th December, 1919, the Irish Government raided the Dublin Mansion House and that same day arrested and deported leading members of the Sinn Fein Party. Four days later, they suppressed *Freeman's Journal*. On the 19th December, as the Lord Lieutenant was driving from Ashdown Station on the outskirts of Dublin to Viceregal Lodge, from walls and hedges was fired a volley which continued most of the way from the railway station to the Lodge gates. As the car was pitted with bullets and was, besides, the target of a salvo of bombs, it was thought almost miraculous that Lord French escaped with his life.

There is an undated letter, which may or may not have been written at this time, from Bonar Law to Carson:

"Both the Prime Minister and I are very anxious to see you before the Irish Bill comes on on Tuesday. Could you lunch here either to-morrow or Friday, say at a quarter to two o'clock; but I would like if you could come a quarter of an hour before whatever time is fixed."

It is evident that as usual Carson was only consulted after decisions were taken and that his cautions were disregarded by politicians who, although they knew nothing, thought they knew better. Lord Riddell records some table-talk of the 21st December:

"... I found Fisher, Minister of Education, and Scott of the *Manchester Guardian* who had come to see Lloyd George about Irish Home Rule at his invitation. . . . Fisher said that no party in Ireland would be satisfied; but that when the scheme was put into force he thought the Irish would work it. Scott was of the same opinion." Mr. Lloyd George confessed to these optimists that he hated the job. "The Unionists naturally will not be enthusiastic. Carson will not oppose but he will be very

critical and frigid, and the Nationalists, if they come, will be unfriendly." However, as they all agreed, "there is a general feeling that something must be done," and so on Monday, 22nd December, 1919, Mr. Lloyd George laid before the House of Commons his new plan for the settlement of Ireland.

## CHAPTER XL

### *Dilemma*

The new Irish Bill - Union or separation - Exactly like Edward - Six counties or nine - Tom Moles - Swan-song of Union - Carson's dilemma - Queue of crime - Unreasonable Ulster.

THE scheme of government thus introduced to the House of Commons rested upon the polite fiction, which the Prime Minister called a "fundamental fact," that "Irishmen claim the right to control their own domestic concerns," the trouble being, as everybody knew, that Sinn Fein claimed complete independence.

Mr. Lloyd George proposed to confer self-government upon Ireland in "all its domestic concerns"; but to refuse "separation" as "fatal to the security of these islands."

Further, as "in the North East of Ireland we have a population . . . alien in race, alien in sympathy, alien in religion, alien in tradition, alien in outlook from the rest of Ireland, and it would be an outrage on the principle of self-government to place them under the rule of the remainder of the population," it was proposed to create two Parliaments and Governments in Ireland, one for the South and West, and the other for the North-East. And there was, as Carson had proposed in 1916, to be a Council, which might, by agreement, gradually establish a united authority over all Ireland.

The Crown, peace and war, foreign affairs, the Army and the Navy, defence, treason, trade outside Ireland, navigation, wireless and cables, the Post Office, taxation, including customs and income tax, and for three years the police, were to remain under the control of the Imperial Parliament. Control over all these, as well as the unity of Ireland, was precisely what Sinn Fein demanded.

As for the Home Rule Act already on the Statute Book, it was repealed, not merely "because no one wanted it" but because it was no longer practicable.

Sir Edward gave this scheme, as Mr. Lloyd George had predicted, a frigid reception. He mourned the passing of the Union under which Ireland had not only an equal but a superior position "because every Irishman has two votes for the one that an Englishman or a Scotsman has." He did not share in the easy belief "that when you make a change you make an improvement"; he did not believe that the Bill would be for the good of Ireland, and he had the greatest apprehension as to the fate of the Loyalists in the South and West, although, "if the optimism of the Prime Minister wins us peace in Ireland, God knows I am not the one to regret it."

There was, indeed, the cardinal fact that the Bill admitted the right of Ulster to separate treatment. "In the whole conduct of the war you can find no difference between the North-East of Ulster and any part of Great Britain. They fought as you did, they sympathised as you did, they grieved with you, they rejoiced with you. . . . Believe me, they have proved a great asset for you in the late war, in their shipyards and in their factories and in their volunteers at the Front, and why now you should ask them to accept a Parliament if they do not want it, I cannot understand."

Ulster wanted not a separate Parliament but the Union: "We want to remain with you. Do not turn us out. That is what they will say, I know well, when I go over there." Nevertheless, he would go over and put the proposal before them: "Upon their understanding of the question, and upon what they put forward, I would myself be greatly guided in the course I would take on this Bill."

But what about Sinn Fein, with 72 per cent of the representation of Ireland? "I think we may take it for granted that the Sinn Feiners will have nothing to do with your Bill." Here Carson quoted the words of De Valera, "I agree with Sir Edward Carson, that there is nothing between Union and separation." Sinn Fein might either capture the Government set up under the Bill and declare a Republic, or might refuse to work under it. In either case, "What will you do then?"

In these circumstances Carson was not hopeful. All he promised to do was to place the proposals before his friends in Ulster: "So far as I am concerned I shall take counsel with the

people who have so long trusted me, who have trusted me almost more than any leader has ever been trusted, and have given me a latitude far beyond what is generally given to those who lead sections in this House. What they may determine to do, I do not know. But one thing I do know: I will try to do what I have always done—direct them with full reason and the fullest courage.”

Before Carson was to make that journey, however, his domestic happiness was crowned by the birth of a son. Ned was born at a quarter past twelve on the morning of Tuesday, the 17th February, 1920, “exactly like Edward,” as Lady Carson noted in her Diary, and the day after Carson had a great ovation in the House of Commons: “The moment the right hon. gentleman appeared through the swing doors (*The Times* records) the cheer started and grew in violence, both sides joining in it, as he walked up the floor to his place. From his seat at the corner of the second bench below the gangway on the Government side the right hon. gentleman acknowledged the greeting with a bashful smile.”

The Home Rule Bill was introduced formally in the House of Commons on Wednesday, the 26th February, 1920. The Cabinet decided—it was said “at the last moment” on a “clean cut of the six north-eastern counties of Ulster—Antrim, Down, Armagh, Londonderry, Fermanagh and Tyrone.” Carson (with Lord Londonderry and Ronald McNeill) arrived in Belfast on the 4th of March to consider these terms at a conference of the Ulster Unionist Council.

It was a decision neither easy nor pleasant to make. Were they to refuse the offer? If the Bill were to be withdrawn the alternative was the Home Rule Act, 1914, which would come into operation automatically at the end of the war; that is to say, when peace was signed with Turkey. Could they take their old stand and resist the operation of that Act by force of arms? Hardly, after what they had been offered. Then were they to agree to take six counties as their territorial domain or make a stand for a United Ulster? There was the terrible dilemma.

As Chairman Sir Edward Carson offered no opinion. It was for the Ulstermen to decide; but he advised them to begin by consulting their constituencies, and so decision was deferred.



In the interim a deputation of the Irish Unionist Alliance from Dublin came to Belfast to consult with Carson on a danger by that time dreadfully imminent. They were already in peril of their lives: law, order, the solid framework of society, were crumbling under their feet. Carson could give them small comfort; but pointed out to them that the Ulstermen, were they to come under the Parliament at Dublin, would only swell their helpless minority, and that, on the other hand, a separate North would be at least a haven of refuge if the worst befell. In the end the Unionists of the South agreed with him that the Unionists of the North could not be blamed for taking the course which they thought best in their own interest and for their own safety.

Meanwhile, the Ulster delegates had been debating the horrid choice between six and nine. The Committee had found that on the six county basis the Northern Parliament would probably consist of thirty-two Unionists and twenty Nationalists and Independents, a majority of twelve, although, on a closer analysis, allowing broader margins for safety, the reading gave thirty-one Unionists and twenty-one Nationalists, a majority of ten.

On the nine county basis, taking the constituencies as they were in the Bill, the result worked out, at the best, at thirty-three Unionists and thirty-one Nationalists, a majority of two, or, upon a less favourable estimate at thirty-two for either party.

Thus if they asked for the nine counties they were proposing for themselves confusion, weakness and deadlock. On the other hand, the delegates of Monaghan, Cavan and Donegal refused to concur in the decision of the Committee.

It was to decide this issue that the Ulster Unionist Council met on the 10th of March, 1920, with Sir Edward Carson again in the Chair. Lord Farnham (Cavan) and Mr. Michael Knight (Monaghan) put the case for holding together in the spirit of the Covenant. The meeting was deeply moved, and for the moment it seemed as if the delegates might sink prudence in compassion; but a greatly respected Belfast Member, hard-headed, clear-thinking Tom Moles, recalled to the Conference the facts of the case—on the one side the safety of a secure majority, on the other the hazards of a bare and precarious

balance. In a sinking ship, with lifeboats sufficient for only two-thirds of the ship's company, were all to condemn themselves to death because all could not be saved?

The Council accepted the logic of the case: they would not support but they would not oppose the Bill. Inasmuch as it was based upon Home Rule they disliked it; inasmuch as it offered something better than the 1914 Act, they would not "assume the responsibility of attempting to defeat it," but would press for amendments in the interests of Ulster and of Unionists throughout the South and West.

Carson, who had taken no part in the debate, approved of the decision. He was not one, he said at a meeting of workmen that same night, to lead his followers into a morass, or for a passing cheer to mislead the people he loved.

Thus these Ulstermen made up their minds, and Carson went back to Westminster for the second reading. On the 31st March, 1920, he made a speech which might be called the swan-song of the Union. "Home Rule," he said, "I never believed in. I do not believe in it now, and I believe it will be fraught with disaster to your country and to mine. As regards my own country, it will be cut off from the greatest Kingdom that has ever existed. . . .

"Ireland is mad to give up her representation in this House. Every injustice and every harm committed on Ireland . . . were inflicted before the Union and not since the Union, and none of them would be possible with the present representation of Ireland in the Imperial Parliament."

Then Carson, in the way he had of thinking aloud, turned to consider "the responsibilities which I have, rightly or wrongly, for so many years, taken upon myself."

"It would be very easy for me to say I will go on and fight to the end regardless of consequences." He was, however, not such a fool as to disregard the cardinal facts—the Act of 1914 upon the Statute Book and the pledges given to Ulster:

"If I help to kill this Bill, I bring automatically into force the Act of 1914. . . . What a nice leader I would be to go to Belfast and call the people there together, and say, 'Look here, you made a Covenant; go and get your rifles again and come out and drill and fight.' For what? For the six counties that

are offered in a Bill which I could have got without fighting at all. No one but a lunatic would undertake such a performance."

Here Joe Devlin interrupted: "The right hon. gentleman," he said, "has got all he ever asked for, and more."

"No, I have not!" Carson retorted. "If I had got all that I ever asked for there would never have been a Home Rule Bill." Therefore, he proceeded, his duty was clear. "I cannot vote for Home Rule, and I will not vote for Home Rule. At the same time I shall do nothing to prevent this Bill from becoming law."

Mr. Asquith, who supported the rejection of the Bill, had said that no one wanted it, which was true; but it was also true that no one wanted the 1914 Act. If they defeated the Bill, what was the question they would put before the country?

"Will you go to the country—I dare you to do it—and say, 'We are determined to drive Ulster under a Dublin Parliament by the forces of the Crown.'

"Will you do that? Will you go down and tell the people of the country, 'Ulster was our most faithful ally and part of ourselves in the war. She sacrificed everything for the war. She did not shoot our troops in the streets at the middle of the most critical period of the war, but for all that, ladies and gentlemen, we propose to put Ulster under the Sinn Fein Parliament in Dublin, and be faithless and treacherous to the men who died in thousands in France and Flanders that never gave us one moment of anxiety throughout the whole course of the war.' Go and preach that on the platforms."

Carson found something to say to those who attributed all the misfortunes to his "rebellion in Ulster":

"I remember the old Fenian times. I was brought up in the middle of them. I remember the old Land League times and I had something to do with the administration of the law at the time when the murders which then disgraced the country went on.

"I remember the newsboys, I was very young at the time, calling out in Dublin, 'Glorious news from Tipperary, another landlord shot.' Now it is 'Glorious news from Thurles, another policeman shot.'

"I remember it all very well. I remember the Phoenix Park  
AAC

murders and I remember the boys in the streets rolling out, 'Phoenix Park murders, the whole discovery found out.'

"I remember it all perfectly well. It has been a tragic, may I call it, queue of crime, which has always in one form or another taken this brutal method of assassination."

Yet he did not believe that these assassinations were the work of his countrymen, but of "ill-conditioned men from America."

"I myself, when the Ulster business was at its height, got a message one day from Scotland Yard as I was coming down here, to tell me to be careful as six men had left New York from the Clan-na-Gael to assassinate me. These are the Irishmen, these are the people. . . ."

Then he turned again to Ulster, "unreasonable Ulster . . . always unreasonable . . . so unreasonable that she never asks for anything . . . so unreasonable that she values her citizenship in the United Kingdom, a thing despised by hon. members. . . . It may turn out that the only part of Ireland which will have a Parliament is the part which never asked for it. Has Ulster ever been false to you? Has Ulster ever been false to the Empire? What is it you want me to do in relation to Ulster? You are always talking of me as some unreasonable man who . . . is bringing about some great wrong to Ireland or to the United Kingdom. What is it you want me to do? I ask you from your hearts, do you want me to go over and say to the Ulster people, 'Go and entrust your destinies and the destinies of your children to a Sinn Fein Parliament in Dublin'? Is that what you want me to do? If it is, all I can say is that if I did it you would have lost your last friends in Ireland. . . ."

## CHAPTER XLI

### *Reprisals*

The Royal Irish Constabulary - The Irish Courts - Ferocity - Dragging in America - Keeping the peace - Reprisals - The list.

"YOUR last friends in Ireland"—these were ominous words. That magnificent body, the Royal Irish Constabulary, so loyal and devoted, so often betrayed, was by that time a beleaguered and desperate garrison, its families boycotted, its stragglers murdered. Between the 1st of January, and the 13th of May, 1920, no fewer than thirty policemen had been killed and forty-eight wounded, and against these thirty murders not a single arrest had been made. "As far as we possibly can," they reported, "we take up the offensive; but our blows fall on empty air, as the enemy forces at once take up the rôle of innocent peasants whom we must not touch." They were not only ambushed in the roads, they were besieged in their stations. Thus in May the little police barracks at Kilmallow was attacked by a force of three or four hundred men, with guns and bombs and incendiary machines. The garrison of nine held their own until the blazing roof fell upon their heads and killed the sergeant and one of the men; then the survivors, blackened and burnt, charged the rabble with fixed bayonets and put them to flight. But such sorties as these could not conceal the fact that the British Government was being beaten in Ireland.

On the 4th of May the Dublin Corporation placed itself under the authority of Dail Eireann; on the 28th of June it was reported in *The Times* that the establishment of Sinn Fein Courts had caused "increasing confusion and alarm in legal circles in Ireland," the Bar and Solicitors being "confronted with the prospect of an almost total loss of their normal business." The County Court Judges found nothing to do at Quarter Sessions; even the High Court was almost deserted; and the hungry lawyers awaited with gloomy anticipation the results of the

forthcoming Assizes. The Bar, to its honour, stood out against attendance at the courts of the rebels; but the Solicitors were inclined to hedge. It was necessary to make a living, they said, and if the Government did not want such courts it was the duty of Government to suppress them. Carson, in the House of Commons, pressed, but pressed in vain, for a statutory declaration that whatever happened no judgment of or contract made by these courts would be allowed to stand.

In April Sir Ian Macpherson, broken in health by his ordeal, had given way to Sir Hamar Greenwood; Sir Nevil Macready was shortly after put in Command of the Forces in Ireland, and Sir Henry Tudor, an excellent soldier, was given charge of the police, whose thinned ranks were filled out and supplemented with recruits drawn from the demobilised forces. But a compromising Government still refused to permit martial law.

Law, being weak, sometimes fell to violence. Thus at Balbriggan in September when Inspector Burke and a constable were shot with expanding bullets, at Tralee when two constables were thrown alive into the furnace of the gasworks; at Tubercurry in October, when five constables were found lying in the road with their brains battered out, and at some other times and places under similar provocation, the police broke loose, burned the shops and houses of the disaffected, and shot without trial men whom they took on mere notoriety.<sup>1</sup>

Carson saw in such events something more than the native ferocity of the primitive Irish. It was all, he said, in one of his speeches on the Bill, part of one scheme to destroy the British Empire. "The same American-Irishmen who were working this mischief in Ireland, and who visited that country last year, had an Irish office, an Egyptian office and an Indian office in New York. Sinn Fein was only a premeditated part of a great conspiracy, not out of love for Ireland but out of hatred for Great Britain, founded by Germany and by our enemies everywhere."

Knowing these things Carson was the more indignant at the subservience to the United States which was almost common form among English politicians and newspapers at that time. Thus when the intrepid Colonel Seely deprecated any delay in passing the Bill as "fatal to our relations with America," Carson

<sup>1</sup> Allison Phillips, *The Revolution in Ireland*, p. 188.

turned on him with some asperity. "The proposal," he said—they were debating second chambers in the Irish Parliament—"was one which could be discussed without dragging in America. It was high time that America—or those who pretended to speak for her—should learn to understand that we were still a great Power and that we were not subordinated either to her or any other. . . . He hoped that America would drop out of the discussion."

When the Foreign Relations Committee of the Senate so far forgot international good manners as to conduct an inquiry into the state of Ireland, Carson received an invitation from the "American Commission on Conditions in Ireland" to go over to Washington and give "authentic expression of your viewpoint." Carson replied that "so far as I can ascertain any such Commission has no mandate or authority from the British Government which alone has the right to deal with affairs in the United Kingdom," and he added his belief that "all true Americans, who desire a close friendship between their country and ours, will resent such unwarranted interference with the affairs of a foreign friendly State."

As the forces of Sinn Fein grew in power so they pressed upon the North, and the Ulstermen stirred uneasily as murder increased outside, along and within their borders. In March, at Belfast, Carson exhorted the public to support the police, the best friends of the people. If need be, he said, the whole of society would be organised to put an end to "dastardly assassination."

There was need of practical measures, which Carson concerted with his friends and pressed upon the Government. Thus we find him writing to Bonar Law on the 26th April, 1920, reporting the opinion of his Ulster colleagues: the Loyalists were becoming daily more restive; there was grave apprehension that the Sinn Feiners might begin such activities as would provoke retaliation, and so "bring our own friends into collision with the authorities, which they were most anxious to avoid." If a conflict were to break out between their people and the Sinn Feiners, "we would be at a great disadvantage as the latter are so completely supplied with arms, ammunition, bombs, etc." Carson went on to remind Bonar Law how, by the discipline of

the Volunteers, they had contrived to keep order in the difficult times before the war "for the first time in the history of Belfast." Such an organisation had become impossible as all the arms had been handed over to the control of the Government; but he thought it most desirable for the preservation of peace that those willing to help to put down crime should be organised in aid of the Government.

On the 14th of May, 1920, Dawson Bates wrote to Carson on the same subject. Belfast, he said, was in a very excited condition, the more for Belfast gaol having been handed over for the internment of Sinn Feiners: "If Belfast gets out of hand I don't know what the consequences will be; but the feeling of everyone in the North of Ireland is this, that if the Government cannot undertake order, someone else will have to do so. Bates proposed the "old formation of the Ulster Volunteer Force," with legal authority for the use of the rifles. Unless the Government took some such step, "the only alternative is that the various loyalist magistrates should meet and appoint special constables on their own responsibility."

The Government hesitated and delayed. "If it became necessary," Carson wrote to Dawson Bates, on the 30th June, 1920, "by reason of the inability of the Government to carry out its essential duties, I shall not hesitate at any cost, with the co-operation and under the control of the Government, if they will allow it, and, if not on our own responsibility, to organise our people for defence against those crimes which are ruining Ireland and making our country a by-word amongst civilised nations."

Meanwhile the trouble grew. On the 8th of August Inspector Swanzy was murdered at Lisburn, and the Protestants burned down the houses of the Catholics; in September a policeman was murdered in Belfast, and Colonel Smythe, a Belfast man who had taken police duty in Cork, was shot down as he sat in his Club in that city. Fighting began between Nationalists and Orangemen, and the men in the dockyards and factories threatened to throw out every Catholic workman. To save themselves these unfortunates were forced to sign declarations that they had no sympathy with Sinn Fein.

This mob law fell alike on the just and unjust. An Irish



Nationalist, one Michael Cunningham, wrote from County Durham to Joseph Devlin stating his pitiful case. He and his two sons had served throughout the war, and "have all suffered or are suffering from wounds and gas," yet he and his family had been driven out of their home in Belfast to "look for a living amongst strangers," and he alleged that hundreds of other ex-service men had been expelled for no other reason than their Catholic faith.

Devlin referred the case to the Prime Minister, who passed it on, with a strong letter, to Carson.

"Of course such a case," Carson replied (on the 3rd November, 1920), "is most discreditable, if true, to Belfast. I have no doubt in the early outbreak in the shipyards and elsewhere after the murders of Smythe and Swanzy, there were cases which were dealt with without any discrimination; but you are aware that since matters have cooled down. I believe myself that the Special Constables, if properly selected, will go far to prevent similar cases occurring, and I need hardly say that I will have this particular case investigated."

The logic of the case in the end forced the Government to acquiesce in these proposals. "Ireland is as you know it," Bonar Law wrote to Carson on the 16th September, 1920. "I feel sure that the move about Ulster is right and I was very glad to get it agreed to. I have throughout been more afraid of the possible trouble there than even in the rest of Ireland.

"I think," Bonar Law continued thoughtfully, "if there are deaths from hunger-striking there will be a real danger of attempts at assassination here, and Lloyd George and yourself seem to me to be those who should be most careful. I had an amusing talk with L. G. about it. He said, 'I have great confidence that the bullet intended for me will hit the other fellow,' which suggests the obvious reply that I would be slow to go for a walk with him.

"I have spoken to Basil Thomson<sup>1</sup> again about you; but whether they can be of any real use I do not know."

Either then or later, the Prime Minister himself reinforced this warning. As Carson entered the Privy Council Room one day

<sup>1</sup> Sir Basil Thomson, at that time Director Special Branch Metropolitan Police.

Mr. Lloyd George went up to him, and taking him urgently by the lapel of his coat asked him:

“Are you protected, Carson?”

“How do you mean ‘protected,’ Prime Minister?”

“Protected by the police, of course,” Mr. Lloyd George retorted in his quick impatient way.

“Well,” said Carson, “there’s a decent old sergant I often notice hanging round Eaton Place.”

“Don’t joke about it,” the Prime Minister retorted. “I’m serious. We’ve found the list.”

“What list?” asked Carson.

“The list of those who are going to be murdered, Carson,” said Mr. Lloyd George, “and you’re the first on the list and I’m the second.”

It was in these ominous circumstances that at the end of 1920 the new Home Rule Bill became law. From his speeches and the whole history of the case it is plain that Carson was no party to a measure in which he acquiesced as the lesser evil. He had saved the North; the South he could not save.

## CHAPTER XLII

### *The Wakeford Case*

Incredible! — The Archdeacon's story — A plain unvarnished tale — Was it a conspiracy? — Inconsistencies — Lord Birkenhead's judgment.

OF all the notable causes in which Sir Edward Carson appeared few excited more public interest or more divided public opinion than the last, the celebrated case of Archdeacon Wakeford. A purse had been raised by subscription to finance the appeal, and the nation was divided between those who supported his innocence and those who asserted his guilt. By a curious coincidence the appeal was heard in the court in which Carson was shortly to take his seat as judge, the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council, and the approaches to that august tribunal were so thronged by gentlemen of piety and ladies of fashion that there was almost a riot in Downing Street.

The background and some of the characters of the story might have come out of a novel by Anthony Trollope, although the Victorian novelist would hardly have placed a dignitary of the Church in so compromising a situation. The Venerable John Wakeford, Canon and Precentor of Lincoln Cathedral, Archdeacon of Stow and Vicar of Kirkstead, was at the time upwards of sixty years of age, a man evidently of character and intelligence, dignified and impressive, widely known and highly respected as a diocesan administrator, a preacher and a writer of many books on theology and devotion. The Bishop of Lichfield testified that although the character of his friend made the accusations fantastic there was an element in his personality which might excite enmity, and certainly of malice (which is not altogether unknown in our Cathedral cities) there was more than a suggestion as the case proceeded. It should here be explained that it was because there was evidence of bias in one of the assessors (and because the conduct of the case had been in one respect irregular) that an appeal had been admitted, and what the Committee

heard was in effect a retrial, with the appearance of witnesses and the production of documents as in the Consistory Court of the Diocese of Lincoln in which the case was originally tried.

The allegations, as Carson pointed out in opening the case for the defence, were so extraordinary as to appear incredible. Here was a venerable clergyman, well known over the country, in broad daylight, without concealment, in clerical garb and gaiters, going to an hotel in the midst of a cathedral city, in the diocese next to his own, with a young woman who was not his wife, and not merely upon one but upon two occasions. "If the case for the prosecution was true," said Carson, "there could be no explanation except that the Archdeacon was mad, and nobody ever made that suggestion."

The Archdeacon, certainly, was anything but mad. He gave his evidence in a manner which impressed the court with its precision as to time and place and its confident directness of narration. "Being essentially the product of one mind," said the Lord Chancellor, of the Archdeacon's story, "and that the mind of a man of observation and intelligence, on matters within his own knowledge, it is complete and consistent with itself."

The Archdeacon described how overburdened with work he was at the time. In the six days down to the 14th March, 1920, he had preached fourteen sermons, besides services and clerical work, and had found no leisure to prepare a course of addresses to the business men of Liverpool which he had undertaken to deliver. In order to prepare these sermons and to have a free day to himself in a church where he was not officiating he had gone to Peterborough on a Sunday evening, and had put up at the Bull Hotel, where he had stayed before upon two occasions. It was not a house frequented by his cloth; but he wanted to be quiet and "had no desire to be dragged into conversation with other clergymen."

He had signed the visitors' book (rather illegibly but the light was bad and he had to raise the book on his arm while he wrote); he had dined alone with half a bottle of claret; he had slept alone (though in a double-bedded room); he never wore pyjamas and had worn his ordinary nightshirt; next day he had gone to St. John's Church near the Cathedral and then to the Cathedral itself; he had meditated in the nave, preparing for his sermons, and as he

was walking away had seen a girl puzzling over that famous inscription to the sexton on the West wall, "He buried here two Queens," which concerned the tombs of Queen Mary of Scots and Catherine of Aragon. Then he met the Dean and vergier, and as he left the Cathedral saw the girl again sheltering from the rain in the porch and escorted her to a shop opposite where he helped her to buy a picture postcard of the said inscription, and so left her—his only transaction with girl or woman during his stay in Peterborough. As for the second occasion, he had been conducting a series of services at St. Luke's, Chelsea, had proposed to return on the evening of Good Friday to Lincoln for a meeting of Archdeacons on the Saturday, had discovered that there was no train beyond Peterborough, had stayed there for the night (again at the Bull and again in a double room) and had discovered to his surprise when he got to the Bishop's Palace at Lincoln that there was no meeting.

Such was the Archdeacon's plain unvarnished tale, which was "consistent with itself" but in conflict at many points with the case for the prosecution. That case, as the Lord Chancellor said, was "a mosaic of statements made by a great number of persons, each of whom can only speak to particular moments of time or particular instances. It does not fit altogether so as in all respects to form a complete picture, nor is it always consistent with itself."

With the inconsistencies Carson made free play, and he argued also that there was evidence of malice to suggest a conspiracy. The matter had first been taken up by the Rev. Herbert Worthington, rector of Nether Seale, Ashby-de-la-Zouch, Mrs. Wakeford's brother, who was hardly on speaking terms with his brother-in-law. When he went to his sister with the disagreeable news that the name of the Archdeacon "and wife" was in the register of the Bull Hotel, she had thereupon said: "This is C. T. Moore," and as a matter of fact it was Mr. C. T. Moore, the rector of Appleby Magna, who had helped Mr. Worthington to prepare the case.

"Did you know," Sir Edward Carson asked Mr. Worthington, "that Mr. Moore was very hostile to Archdeacon Wakeford?"—"No, I have known him for thirty years, and I've never heard him say a vindictive word against him."

"Do you remember when Mr. Moore was charged with staying in a house belonging to a Mrs. Ellis, which was said to be an immoral house?"—"Yes."

"He said that he did not know that it was an immoral house, and they accepted his statement?"—"He did."

"You know that it was Archdeacon Wakeford who had sent the papers relating to this matter to the Bishop?"—"Yes."

"Did you know that the Archdeacon had had controversies with Moore about the Church at Kirkstead?"—"I did."

"Was that on Moore's property?"—"On his Lincolnshire estate."

. . . . .

"Do you know that because he did not present to the benefice it went to the Bishop and that it was given by the Bishop to Archdeacon Wakeford?"—"I do know now."

"Do you know that Moore tried to prevent people from going there?"—"No."

"And that as he did not maintain the roads leading to the Church the matter was referred to the County Council?"—"I did not know."

"Do you know that he was on unfriendly terms with your brother-in-law?"—"Yes."

. . . . .

"Was it Moore who employed the detective, Agar?"—"He sent him to help me."

"Why did Moore employ detectives to hunt down the Archdeacon?"—"Agar is not a detective."

"But he is an ex-policeman?"—"Agar married Mr. Moore's cook. . . ."

There was the suggestion, then, of enmity if not of conspiracy, on the part of those who had set the case afoot, and Mrs. Wakeford sharply contradicted her brother when he alleged that she had complained of her husband's conduct.

"What kind of confidence existed between you and your husband?"—"Absolute."

The Lord Chancellor: "Have you ever complained to your brother of lightness of conduct on the part of your husband with any woman?"—"Never."

Their relations had always been of the best.

There was indeed a painful moment when Mr. Hogg (afterwards Lord Chancellor), Senior Counsel for the Prosecution, confronted Mrs. Wakeford with a letter which she had written to her brother: "You have been digging up graves which I had painfully digged in and planted over"; but Mrs. Wakeford offered an explanation—was it candour or was it a supreme example of wifely devotion?—which thrilled the court.—"I was the offender in those early days, not my husband."

Moreover, she had been with her husband when Moore had tried to block their way to Kirkstead Church and had said to the Archdeacon—"It's all right, Wakeford, I will get you yet."

Then Mr. Worthington had tried to fix the scandal upon a certain lady, who had at one time helped the Archdeacon with his clerical work; but that part of his allegations had fallen to the ground as soon as it was examined.

The offender, indeed, had never been produced. "Where was the woman?" Carson asked. "Where did she come from? Where did she go? It was a strange thing in the case that there had never been the slightest effort to trace the woman. She was a sort of mystery woman."

Moreover, there were other discrepancies in the case for the prosecution. The books of the Bull Hotel were remissly kept. Mr. Pugh, the landlord, admitted that he himself entered the words "and wife" upon the first occasion. There was a dispute as to the handwriting on the second occasion, when "and wife" and "C. Wakeford" had followed the Archdeacon's name. Moreover the Pughs had said that the Archdeacon was wearing pyjamas marked with his name; but it was shown in evidence that the Archdeacon was not in the habit of wearing pyjamas and had no pyjamas marked with his name. The Pughs had even made a journey to London to identify the lady whom Worthington had wrongly connected with the case. Their evidence on those points put their testimony in doubt.

The evidence of the waitress was plainly false. She testified that she had heard the Archdeacon say to his companion in her presence: "You must be very wise; you must frankly deny that you stayed here with me." (Was it likely?) And that he had said to her again at table, "Put down your hands," because the

lady was not wearing a wedding-ring. But there was a married couple to prove for the defence that they had dined that night in the "Bull," that the wife was not wearing her wedding-ring and that the husband had jestingly said to her, "Mary, take your hands off the table, or they will throw you out of the place." The waitress plainly had transferred this remark from the lips of the husband to the mouth of the Archdeacon.

Then the evidence of the Peterborough police, who had taken a curious interest in the case, was open to question. They had certainly given a misleading explanation of why they had concerned themselves in the visit of the Archdeacon to the Bull Hotel.

Altogether, a very pretty conspiracy, or so it seemed as Carson put the case for the defence. But, alas:

*Do not all charms fly  
At the mere touch of cold philosophy?*

The judgment of the Board<sup>1</sup> is said to be the ablest that Lord Birkenhead ever delivered—a masterpiece of close reasoning upon facts. It occupies twelve closely printed columns of *The Times*, but no doubt the decisive passage is where the Lord Chancellor directed his strong mind to prove that there could not have been a conspiracy at the time alleged.

"If," said His Lordship, "the theory of conspiracy is pinned down to so early a date, its impossibility becomes apparent. When the appellant left Lincoln on the evening of the 14th March, 1920, he had told his wife, and so far as we know no other person, that he was going to Peterborough, but he did not tell her that he was going to stay at the Bull Hotel. Indeed he only made up his mind to do so when the train arrived. . . . Let it be assumed that Moore and Worthington were waiting eagerly for an opportunity to trap the appellant. Why should they have selected Peterborough to be the stage of their machinations? Let it be assumed that King [a police witness] was their willing instrument for this daring and wicked plan. How did it come about that he had either been selected and corrupted for

<sup>1</sup> The Lord Chancellor, Lord Buckmaster, Lord Dunedin and Lord Shaw, with four Bishops as Assessors. See *The Times*, 8th April, 1921, *et seq.*, for report of the case.



the purpose before the appellant went to Peterborough at all, on the mere chance that he might go there some day, or that Moore and Worthington, from their respective vicarages of Appleby Magna and Nether Seale procured his services in the hours that elapsed between Sunday evening and Monday afternoon? Let it be assumed again that the plot had been framed and set in motion. By what amazing coincidence did it come about that the appellant should have selected on this occasion the one hotel in Peterborough whose landlord was ready to be corrupted, able to carry with him into this maze of slander and perjury his wife and his servants and zealous to commence a systematic course of forgery in support of the plan."

Thus Carson lost the last great case which he handled as an advocate. It is said that he had shed tears when he left the House of Commons. As he had no love for politics, it is more likely that he shed tears when he left the Bar.

## CHAPTER XLIII

### *Lord of Appeal*

The leadership - Lord of Appeal - Furtive approaches - "The game is up" - Austen Chamberlain - De Valera - General Smuts - Pressure on Ulster - Bonar Law drops a hint.

THE time had come for Sir Edward Carson to divest himself of his authority in Ulster. Gently repulsing the entreaties of his friends, he proposed that Sir James Craig should succeed him in the leadership. The change was made at a sorrowful meeting of the Ulster Unionist Council in Belfast on the 4th of February, 1921. "I have been your leader for some eleven years," said Carson. "In that time I have never had a single quarrel, or if I have I have forgotten it. I don't believe any leader has ever had such confidence reposed in him for so long a time, so much love and so much affection." He gave them his advice on parting. "From the outset let them see that the Catholic minority have nothing to fear from the Protestant majority. Let them take care to win all that was best among those who had been opposed to them in the past: while maintaining intact their own religion, let them give the same rights to the religion of their neighbours." Then referring to Sir James Craig, he said, "he was my First Lieutenant in all the dangerous times we went through in the past and a dearer or more lovable friend I have never met."

Thus things were settled: James Craig would preside over the new Government in Ulster, and Carson would go back to "hold the fort at Westminster." Before leaving, he found some stern words to say to those who were trying to found a Republic "in infamy and blood." "I say to those men, whoever they are, who are at the back of this movement—'Call a halt and take conference with your God.'"

Sinn Fein, indeed, had no thought of conference either with God or man. In the election of May 1921, by which the Dublin Parliament was created, they decreed that there was to be no contest, and so it was: for 128 constituencies 124 of their men

were returned unopposed, and when Parliament met only the four members of Trinity College answered the summons to the Lower House. So much for Mr. Herbert Fisher's and Mr. Scott's opinion that "when the scheme was put into force the Irish would work it."

In the Northern Parliament, on the contrary, the Unionists did better than their anticipations, winning thirty-two of the fifty-two seats. Sir James Craig and his friends formed a Government, strong and united; His Majesty the King opened the first session of Parliament in person, and thus it came about, as Carson had predicted, that the only part of Ireland to accept Home Rule was the part which did not want it.

There Carson's political work came to an end. Northern Ireland, at least, was settled, and the Government, as Mr. Lloyd George boasted, was getting "murder by the throat" in the South. With the resources at the command of the State it could only be a question of time, or so at least Carson thought. Almost his last speech in the House of Commons was an urgent warning against unwise economy in the Navy, which would expose the nation, as he predicted, to very grave danger. A few days later he pleaded another cause near to his heart, the schools of Ireland. "How," he asked, "could a discontented, underpaid and half-starved body of teachers be expected to bring up children as loyal citizens?"

Carson still worked at the courts. Litigants were as eager as ever for his services; but he had no longer the old confidence in his powers. Thus, for example, he showed a friend a brief marked four thousand guineas which he was sending back because he had only been given ten days to prepare the case. "I could have done it once," he said sorrowfully, "but not now."

So it came about, as was gazetted on the 24th May, 1921, that Sir Edward Carson was appointed Lord of Appeal in Ordinary in the room of Lord Moulton deceased. After forty-four years of practice at the Bar, of which twenty-eight years were in England, he might feel himself competent to fill such a place. He took his seat in the House of Lords with the title of Lord Carson of Duncairn, and thought it best for his name and his family that his peerage should end with his life.

Now it may be merely a coincidence that on the 24th of May,  
BBC

1921, the very day that Carson was translated to the Bench, the Prime Minister invited De Valera and Sir James Craig to a conference in Downing Street.

He would be a bold historian who would venture to say when and in what form the secret approaches of Mr. Lloyd George to the Irish rebels began. One of his channels was Alfred Cope, a Civil Servant, who had served in the Excise in Belfast and who had gone as Assistant Under Secretary to Dublin in 1920. Mr. Cope, says Alison Phillips, "had begun his career at the Castle by summarily dismissing certain old and trusted civil servants whose intimate knowledge of criminal activities in Ireland was apparently inconvenient, and is now known to have been carrying on negotiations *sub rosa* with the Sinn Féin leaders." Upon Cope's advice an Australian prelate of the Roman Catholic Church, Archbishop Clune, was working in December 1920 between Mr. Lloyd George on the one side and Arthur Griffith (in prison) and Michael Collins (on the run) on the other. When these negotiations broke down they were resumed between De Valera, who in the meantime had come back from America, and Lord Derby, who was in Dublin in April 1921, his burly form disguised (it is said) in the garb of a priest and the broad effulgence of his face a little clouded behind a pair of horn-rimmed spectacles. Noblesse oblige ! De Valera, as he afterwards boasted in the Dail, "talked to Lord Derby as he would to a pressman."

These furtive approaches were resented by the police in Ireland who had endured and suffered incredible things, but under General Tudor were rapidly re-establishing their authority and, in the spring of 1921, had victory in sight, when they saw their enemies encouraged and themselves betrayed.

As for the Sinn Féiners, they had been everywhere "on the run"; the "Irish Republican Army," as Mulcahy, "Chief of the Staff," reported, had almost exhausted its reserves of ammunition and had lost so many men that it could not have hoped to carry on much longer. "There was not one of them who did not know that the Truce came only just in the nick of time—that the war if it had gone on any longer might have ended in a complete collapse."<sup>1</sup> Such was the moment chosen

<sup>1</sup> P. S. O'Hegarty, *The Victory of Sinn Féin*, p. 82 et seq.

by the British Government to make terms with rebellion.

The choice of De Valera seemed to aggravate the injury: he had organised the treacherous massacre of the Sherwood Foresters in Easter Week 1916; his life had been spared on the plea that he was an American citizen; he had incited the Irish to the boycott and murder of the police; from the comparative safety of the United States he had gloried in that "Red Sunday" when fourteen British officers were murdered in their bedrooms; yet when he was at last caught in Blackrock and brought to Dublin Castle "a personal order came by telegram from Lloyd George that he was to be released at once."<sup>2</sup>

The British Government may have been encouraged to these negotiations by the spread of Irish outrage to England. Cases of arson and murder were reported at various places, and papers captured in Dublin discovered plans to destroy the shipping of Liverpool and the electrical plant of Manchester. There were international exigencies which pushed in the same direction. On the 19th August, 1921, Tim Healy wrote to his brother: "Lloyd George cannot visit Washington until he has settled with Ireland, and this is the only pull we have on him." However it came about, so it happened.

Shortly after he had been made a Lord of Appeal, Carson was lunching with Bonar Law when he was told that the Prime Minister urgently wanted to see him.

"I am going to tell you something which will surprise you very much," said Mr. Lloyd George when they met.

"What is that?" said Carson.

"The game is up," Mr. Lloyd George replied, and he went on to say that the Government could not get the troops to go on in Ireland, and so "We shall have to give in."

"Why do you tell this to me?" asked Carson.

"I thought you had a right to know," replied Mr. Lloyd George.

The three met again that night at dinner, when the Prime Minister more fully explained his position.

"Of course," he said, "I shall have to go, because of the way the police have supported me I cannot be responsible for the surrender." And he went on to explain to Carson how he

<sup>2</sup> Denis Gwynn, *De Valera*, p. 180.

would have to advise the King to send for either Mr. Asquith or Mr. Barnes.

Carson argued strongly against a surrender which he thought shameful and disastrous; but the Prime Minister replied that there was no other course open to him, insisting that Worthington-Evans, then Secretary of State for War, had made it clear to him that he had come to the end of his resources.

"Well then," said Carson, "there is one thing I hope you won't do, and that is to involve the Conservative Members of your Government, Austen Chamberlain and Lord Birkenhead, in the discredit of such a surrender."

"Of course not," replied Mr. Lloyd George. "Have I not said that I intend to resign?"

The Prime Minister, however, did not resign. When he saw Carson next he said light-heartedly that when he had broached the matter to Austen Chamberlain, Austen had replied that he saw no necessity to resign, that if there were to be negotiations he did not see why their Government should not conduct them; that, indeed, Austen had actually suggested the negotiations. Carson found the news incredible; but it was true.

About that time Sir Henry Wilson, then Chief of the Imperial General Staff, came to Carson in high indignation. The statement that there were no troops for Ireland he denounced as untrue, and he proceeded to tell Carson of a "most unpleasant" interview with the Prime Minister. The Field-Marshal had gone into the Cabinet Room at 10 Downing Street to look at some maps and had there found Mr. Lloyd George, who had told him that he wanted him to meet De Valera who was coming over, to which Wilson replied that he did not speak to murderers. The Prime Minister had replied, "Oh, nonsense; in public life we must do these things," and left the room in a huff, Wilson shouting after him that if he met De Valera he would hand him over to the police.<sup>1</sup>

On the 14th of July, 1921, the Prime Minister received De Valera in that same room, and after a talk of two and a half hours they had tea together; on the 15th Sir James Craig arrived and there was a long conversation between the three men. How

<sup>1</sup> See also Callwell, *Field-Marshal Sir Henry Wilson*, for another account of this interview, there dated 5th July, 1921.

it went we gather from a statement issued by Craig on the 18th: De Valera, he said, founded his claim on the basis of self-determination; the people of Northern Ireland had the same right to determine their own problem and had decided by a great majority for "no partition." De Valera and his friends had admitted that right by standing as candidates for the Northern Parliament, which, on its part, made no claim to interfere with the settlement between the British Government and Southern Ireland.

Sinn Fein, however, had no intention to leave Ulster alone. The gunmen of the I.R.A., taking advantage of the truce which had already been concluded in Southern Ireland, crept into Belfast and began a new career of murder in that city. On the 14th July, the day that De Valera was at Downing Street, the gunmen were active in Belfast with rifles, revolvers and bombs. In the riots of the week previous to the 16th July twenty deaths were recorded in the city hospitals besides others which must have occurred elsewhere and two hundred were wounded. Nor was there any room for doubt as to the source of these attacks. Eoin O'Duffy, described as "Sinn Fein liaison officer for Ulster," boasted some little time later that he had placed sentries at vantage points "who had made their presence felt." He had "ordered his troops to cease fire"; but "these people [the people of Ulster] would soon have to declare whether they were for Ireland or the British Empire. If they decided against Ireland we will have to take suitable action. We will have to put on the screw of the boycott; we will tighten that screw and if necessary we will have to use the lead against them."<sup>1</sup>

Thus, while these negotiations proceeded Belfast was under siege, and it is interesting to know upon what side the British Government stood in these hostilities. On the 5th of August General Macready reported to Sir Henry Wilson "an interview . . . at Criccieth during which Lloyd George laid the blame on Ulster for 'delay in peace' and proposed a monstrous plan of withdrawal and blockade if hostilities were renewed."

Sir James Craig, meanwhile, stood like a rock. The astute South African, General Smuts, was moved to take a hand, in vain. On the 4th of August he wrote to "my dear De Valera"

<sup>1</sup> *The Times*, September 7th, 1921, p. 8.

that he had done his best to bring about a meeting; but that Sir James Craig would only meet De Valera in the presence of Mr. Lloyd George—"and nothing I have been able to do or say has moved him." "Ulster," General Smuts continued, "is satisfied with her present status and will on no account agree to any change. . . . My strong advice to you is to leave Ulster alone for the present, leaving it to the pull of economic and other physical forces eventually to bring Ulster into that State." Smuts was right in this opinion of the Ulstermen. "I will never betray one of you," Craig said at Belfast on the 16th October, 1921; "I will stick to you to the bitter end. Ulster is not a cheese to nibble at; it is a rock of granite which will break the teeth of those mice who attempt it."

The greater part of the English Press, led by *The Times*, joined in the attempt to argue, bully and cajole Ulster out of her position. Carson was the head and front of the offending, and was reproached by *The Times* for neglecting to "achieve the unity of Ireland" and for being "quite without constructive ability of any kind." Carson made characteristic retort upon the eve of the dedication of the Ulster War Memorial at Thiepval. "Is it too much to ask that on Saturday," he wrote (on the 17th November), "those who feel gratitude towards the fallen heroes should turn their minds for even a moment from the abuse, misrepresentation and cruel attacks which are being made upon Ulster?"

These Press attacks screened the policy of the Government, which was summed up scornfully by Carson as "that pleasant way they have of trying to buy off their enemies at the expense of their friends." The negotiations had not been going well: Griffith, Collins and their friends were stubborn for independence, and De Valera nearly wrecked the Conference by telegraphing to the Pope that Ireland owed no allegiance to the British Crown.

In these circumstances Mr. Lloyd George informed Sir James Craig that he was negotiating on the basis of an All-Ireland Parliament with guarantees for the North and that the time had therefore come for Ulster to enter the Conference. The Province would be left with such powers as had been granted under the Act of 1920, but in such vital matters as Customs,



Police, and the whole range of residuary powers Ulster was to be put under Dublin. Craig immediately summoned his Cabinet to meet in London, and they refused to take part in any negotiations upon that basis.

Mr. Lloyd George used both menaces and inducements: if Ulster would not agree to his proposals, then the question of the area under the Northern Parliament would have to be reopened. Moreover, Customs barriers would have to be established between Northern and Southern Ireland, which would be very bad for trade in the North, and, furthermore, while Southern Ireland would merely have to pay a "voluntary" contribution to Imperial charges, Belfast would be condemned to "bear the same burdens as Liverpool, Glasgow or London."<sup>1</sup>

As Craig set his face the harder against these cajolements, Mr. Lloyd George made a final threat:

"In the latter case, however (i.e. if Northern Ireland would not 'enter the Irish Free State with such guarantees as may be arranged'), we should feel unable to defend the existing boundary, which must be subject to revision on one side and the other by a Boundary Commission under the terms of the Instrument."<sup>2</sup>

The Prime Minister by these policies was putting his own position in some danger since they tended to divide the Conservative Party. Austen Chamberlain and Lord Birkenhead stuck to the Prime Minister; but the rank and file showed signs of mutiny. Austen Chamberlain, leader at that time in the House of Commons, was rash enough to enter into a controversy with the Ulstermen, in the form of a public letter to Ronald McNeill, asking why Carson and Craig did not protest at the time of the Convention when Mr. Lloyd George had first proposed an All-Ireland Parliament. Carson and Craig replied that so far from remaining silent they had both, and instantly, resigned.

Much depended on Bonar Law. His health had given way earlier in the year and he had retired from the Government although not from Parliament, but his word still carried

<sup>1</sup> Letter from the Prime Minister to Sir James Craig, 10th November, 1921 (Cmd. 1561). See also speech by the Marquess of Londonderry, House of Lords, 8th February, 1922.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. Letter of 5th December from the Prime Minister to Sir James Craig.

great weight with his party. At that moment it was heard, clear enough, although in a whisper, upon the side of the North.

"Politicians," said the Parliamentary correspondent of *The Times* (on the 10th November, 1921), "have been anxiously waiting for an indication of the attitude of Mr. Bonar Law. It is known that Sir James Craig has been in touch with Mr. Bonar Law since he came to London. It is understood that Mr. Bonar Law has informed the Ulster Premier that he considers himself bound by the pledges that he gave to Ulster in 1914 and that he holds himself under an obligation to stand by Ulster if there is any endeavour to impose a settlement to which Ulster is opposed."

The effect of this intervention may be judged from a passage in the Diary of Lord Riddell:

"Things look very awkward," said Mr. Lloyd George to Riddell. "Bonar Law has come out as the advocate of Ulster. Whether he thinks he sees his opportunity to become Prime Minister or whether he is solely actuated by a conscientious desire to champion the cause of Ulster I don't know, but I can hardly bring myself to believe that he would desire to supplant me. However, as I have often told you, 'there are no friendships at the top.' Notwithstanding this I have always regarded Bonar Law as different from other politicians and as a sincere friend and supporter."<sup>1</sup>

Mr. Bonar Law was so far different from other politicians as to be unable to break his pledge. As Mr. Lloyd George knew well, behind Bonar Law was the grim menacing shadow of Carson, and with Carson stood Salisbury, Northumberland, Londonderry, and some other good men in the Lords, and not only the Ulster Members, but Colonel Gretton, Henry Page Croft and many other stout Englishmen in the Commons, and further in the background a formidable Scot, Sir George Younger, at the head of the Conservative organisation.

Much depended on the Unionist Party Conference about to be held in Liverpool, and it was thought prudent to make pledges. Sir Laming Worthington-Evans, Secretary of State for War, told the meeting that he would not agree to any settlement

<sup>1</sup> Lord Riddell's *Intimate Diary of the Peace Conference and after*, p. 381.

that required the coercion of Ulster; Austen Chamberlain gave a similar assurance, and the corner was safely turned.

Thus it came about that the Loyalists of the North were not sold with the Loyalists of the South, "like cattle on the hoof," in the three-o'clock-in-the-morning transaction of the 6th December, 1921. Nevertheless, their position under the agreement was equivocal and dangerous.

## CHAPTER XLIV

### *In the House of Lords*

Mutterings of revolt – Curzon and Carson – A terrible retort – A fatal doctrine – Not for sale – Lord Birkenhead – War in Ireland – Judges in politics – Carson's defence – An empty threat.

THE terms, or, as they were called, "the Articles of Agreement for a Treaty between Great Britain and Ireland," roused a muttering of revolt at Westminster. A thing unheard of for the King to make a treaty with the subject; a trick to evade Parliament by dispensing with a Bill; a shameful surrender of British interests, loyal people, and faithful servants—such was the general opinion in the Conservative Party. But in the House the Government was strong; those who murmured were called "Diehards"—a nickname in politics doing better service than an argument—the Press<sup>1</sup> stifled the cries and groans of an abandoned minority; and the hacks and placemen of the Coalition vigorously applauded the eloquence of the Prime Minister.

"Henceforth," he said of Ireland, "our peril will be her danger, our fears will be her anxieties, our victories will be her joy."

The interest of the debate, however, was less in the Commons than in the Lords. Men asked—What will Carson say about it?—and Austen Chamberlain was left to justify his apostasy to empty benches while Members flocked to the Upper House, there to listen to such invective as it had not heard since Chatham laid his lash across the quivering flanks of Murray.

It was unfortunate for Lord Curzon that it should have fallen to him to defend the agreement in the House of Lords. As Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs he had had but little to do with these Irish negotiations, and was chosen, no doubt, for his authority with the Conservatives, and for the respectable

<sup>1</sup> All but the *Morning Post*, which continued to publish a daily tale of murder and outrage.

face which, it was thought, he would put upon the affair. But there was an old feud between Carson and Curzon, going back to the passage of the Parliament Act, when Curzon, after offering to lead the resistance, had led the capitulation. This surrender touched Carson more nearly, and his feelings were aggravated by the complacency with which it was supported. The first hint of his scorn came as the Secretary of State was explaining why a thing "so desirable and so practicable" had not been done before.

"My noble and learned friend Lord Carson smiles," said Lord Curzon.

"No," said Carson, "I laugh."

Then Lord Curzon, in his Olympian manner, read Carson a homily. "The noble and learned Lord," he said, "has now become a judge, a member of the highest Court in the Realm. I hope that . . . the equipoise of his judgment will be soon more solidly fixed . . . that he will remember that he is not only an advocate but . . . has become in large measure an arbiter."

Carson was terrible in retort. "I get," he said, "a long lecture from the noble Marquess, which, may I say, I hope in the future he will spare me; because the man (let me speak plainly) who, in my opinion at all events, has betrayed me has no right afterwards to lecture me."

It may serve to excuse the savagery of Carson if we explain that Curzon had not merely defended the Articles as an evil necessity; but had plumed himself upon them. "If you look at history," he had said, "you find that it is almost invariably by slow and painful, and sometimes by bloodstained stages that great events like the liberation of a country or the attainment of freedom are secured."

Remembering the part which Curzon had played in opposition to Home Rule, it was more than a man of Carson's temper could be expected to endure.

"I wish," he said, "I had something of the eloquence of the noble Marquess in advocating his new-found faith."

"I wonder when it came to him. . . . Was it yesterday or was it the day before?"

"He has what they call in boys' slang 'Gone the whole hog.' It is always the way with the man who has a newly found faith."

I believe in religion they call him a pervert; but I should be sorry to apply an epithet of that kind to so great, so eloquent and so superior a man as the noble Marquess.

"It is a curious thing. I once heard the late Duke of Devonshire. It was one of the earliest political meetings I ever attended and it was in Dublin, and he was commenting upon the then recent change of Mr. Gladstone on this very question. Having quoted some of his previous utterances, the noble Duke made this remark, which I commend, if I may most humbly, to the noble Marquess. He said:

" 'Is it necessary that because a man turns his coat he should divest himself of every particle of his raiment?' I suggest to the noble Marquess that it was not in the least necessary because he came down here with his coat turned, that he should have tried to picture himself in such a state of absolute nudity as his speech appeared to indicate."

Those who saw that debate testify, what it is easy to believe, that Curzon writhed and turned colour under those rebukes. Carson went on to quote a statement recently made "by that great statesman, so intimately connected with Ireland, Mr. Birrell. . . . I never knew it was true until I heard the noble Marquess speak this evening."

"It is a British characteristic," Mr. Birrell had said, "though not an amiable one, that once we are beaten we go over in a body to a successful enemy, and too often abandon and cold shoulder and snub, both in action and writing, the suffering few who adhere to our cause in evil and difficult times."

To these words Carson gave point with the recent case of an Irish officer (a relative of his own) who had returned from service abroad to visit his mother in Ireland, and had been foully murdered for no other reason than that he had refused to subscribe to Sinn Fein. The next night the mother's house had been burnt down, and—while these negotiations were proceeding—"Every single article that this broken-hearted woman had was being auctioned off in the light of day."

Then Carson turned to the Prime Minister and ironically praised his skilful handling of the Press. This "manufactured glorification," however, could not conceal the fact that the terms had been passed "with a revolver pointed at your head."

And Carson proceeded to quote, with a certain sardonic enjoyment, from a speech which Mr. Lloyd George had made at Carnarvon the year before. To concede to crime what would not be given in justice was, Mr. Lloyd George had said, "a fatal doctrine for any government in any country."

"Give it," Mr. Lloyd George had continued, "because it is right, because it is just, because it is good for Ireland, and good for the United Kingdom; but do not give it because you are bullied by assassins."

The Prime Minister had then laughed at the mere possibility of negotiating with the rebels. "Only show me somebody," he had said, "who can deliver the goods."

"What goods," Carson asked, "had anyone delivered? I know of no goods that have been delivered as a consideration for these concessions; but five hundred or six hundred bleeding corpses of men who have tried to do their duty and have lost their lives in the service of their country."

Carson spoke out of the bitterness of his soul. He referred to the defence of the Union, the fight of the past thirty years which he had waged alongside Conservative colleagues "whose friendship and comradeship I hope I will lose to-night, because I do not value any friendship that is not founded upon confidence and trust."

"I was in earnest. What a fool I was! I was only a puppet, and so was Ulster and so was Ireland in the political game that was to get the Conservative Party into power."

Then came a reference to Lord Birkenhead, who had made shrewd use of Ulster and of Carson in his rise to power and was then sitting, flushed and uneasy, on the Woolsack: "Of all the men in my experience that I think are the most loathsome, it is those who will sell their friends for the purpose of conciliating their enemies, and, perhaps, still worse, the men who climb up a ladder of which even I may have been a humble rung, and then, when they have got into power, kick the ladder away without any concern for the pain or injury or mischief or damage that they do to those who have helped them to gain power."

In his berserk fury Carson turned upon another old colleague: "The other evening I saw with disgust that Mr. Austen Chamberlain, the son of Mr. Joseph Chamberlain, having agreed

to put Ulster into these terms, then made an appeal to the comradeship of his old friend, Sir James Craig, to come in and submit to the domination of Sinn Fein. I could not help thinking that it was very like, after having shot a man in the back, going over to him and patting him on the shoulder and saying, 'Old man, die as quickly as you can, and do not make any noise.'"

Then Carson spoke of Ulster, of the attacks made upon that faithful province by the Press and by the statesmen pledged to her defence—"What a splendid thing a statesman's conscience is in modern times," he exclaimed. "It is becoming as elastic as the conscience of the Press, and I do not know which of them, in saying so, I have insulted more.

"What has Ulster done?" he exclaimed. "She has stuck too well to you. These Ulstermen, they had enlisted in their thousands while your new-found friends were murdering your troops in the City of Dublin." Was that why they had turned against Ulster? And Carson went on to describe how, without a word of warning, they had sprung the arrangement upon Ulster.

"We have arranged with the Sinn Feiners that there is to be a Parliament for the whole of Ireland, and that the six counties are to go in, and if you go in, here is good news for you: you are not to pay a 6s. Income Tax, but probably only a 1s. 6d. one, and how happy you ought to be.'"

Carson paused. "Ulster," he added, "is not for sale."

The Government, he went on, had given Dublin control of the Customs; they had given Sinn Fein arms and munitions and power to raise an Army—Why? For no other reason than to force Ulster to join with the rest of Ireland. And this while the boycott of Ulster and of English goods, the stopping of trains, the burning of merchandise were all proceeding for the same purpose—and without interference from the British Government.

"Loyalty," Carson concluded, "is a strange thing. It is something which you cannot get by sitting round a table and trying to find a formula for an Oath of Allegiance which means nothing. It is something born and bred in you.

"I have often—I admit it—when we have been threatened because we were loyal in Ulster . . . I have often said to myself: 'Well, why don't you give it up and join the others?' And I



never did, because I know that it is something that is born in you, inherited in you, and that it is the safety of the State. But do not try us too high. Do recognise that we have tried to help you, as you have helped us, and do not, when we want to stay with you, do anything to turn us out."<sup>1</sup>

Alike in his anger and in his pathos Carson was not merely addressing the Coalition; he was speaking over its head to the Conservative Party and the British people. The Government were the more furious because they had calculated that by making Carson a Lord of Appeal they had procured his silence. His speech, said Lord Birkenhead in a fury, "as a constructive effort of statecraft would have been immature on the lips of a hysterical schoolgirl." But Carson's intention was not constructive. On the contrary, in order to save Ulster, he proposed to make an end of the Coalition. We have evidence on this point in the Diaries of Sir Henry Wilson. Thus on the 14th January, 1922: "I lunched at Londonderry House; only Lord and Lady Londonderry there, and we discussed the probability of forming a real Conservative Party. Lady Londonderry is working hard to this end with Salisbury, Northumberland, Carson, Ronald McNeill, and I am sure this is a right thing to aim for."

The danger of Ulster suggested such desperate expedients. That devoted province was being attacked both from within and without. With the release of prisoners which accompanied the Treaty there were more gunmen for the deadly work in Belfast. On the 7th January, 1922, in the course of an inquest upon nineteen bodies, a District Inspector of Police testified that there were seven thousand hooligans armed with Webley and Smith and Wesson revolvers within that City. With rifle, bomb and automatic, in treacherous and deadly ambushes, from windows and from behind chimney-stacks, they carried on the war. Belfast was kept in universal mourning, in continuous turmoil.

This the British Government could have endured. The Lord Chancellor, indeed, hinted that it was due to a double dose of original sin in Belfast. But the other attack was more open and less easy either to defend or explain. Sir James Craig, in

<sup>1</sup> Parl. Deb., Lords, 2nd Session, 1921, vol. xlviii. (14th December, 1921).

pursuit of peace, saw Michael Collins and proposed terms for the cessation of the boycott, the employment of Catholic workmen and the Boundary Commission. Collins demanded Tyrone, Fermanagh, and large parts besides of Derry, Down and Armagh. On the 7th February, 1922, Craig reported the failure of the negotiations. The very next day bands of the Irish Republican Army invaded Tyrone and Fermanagh, kidnapped thirty Ulster Protestants and carried them away as hostages. A day or two later, a band of eighteen Ulster Special Constables, mostly unarmed, who were passing by train through a corner of the Irish Free State, were stopped at Clones Railway Station by a band of Republicans and in the affray which followed the Republican leader and four of the Ulstermen were shot; eight Ulstermen wounded and five carried off prisoners. Moreover small bodies of Sinn Feiners crossed the border at various points and blew up bridges and destroyed roads evidently as part of a general plan of campaign. Fourteen of them armed with bombs and revolvers were caught red-handed. There could be no longer any disguising it: North and South were at open war.

These events were vastly discomfiting to the British Government, accompanied as they were by a running commentary from the House of Lords. "The joybells have stopped ringing," said Carson, "over the great peace in Ireland; the congratulations have stopped flowing in and we are now brought down to the realities of the situation. . . . What does it all mean? It means this. The Government have laid it down that the way to get what you want in Ireland is to murder and kidnap and to burn houses. . . . They want Tyrone and Fermanagh. 'Let us go there,' they say, 'and raid the houses, burn the houses, kidnap the people, ambush the police, use dumdum bullets and then we will get the British Government to yield.'"

And Carson went on to charge the British Government with supplying the Republican Army with the munitions and the armoured cars for the invasion of Ulster. It was a difficult charge to answer since the Sinn Feiners were going about the border in British military cars with British service rifles and revolvers.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Parl. Deb., Lords, vol. xlii., c. 95 (8th February, 1922).

So this strange conflict went on, with Carson as the sardonic commentator. "I notice," he said (on 21st February, 1922), "that since the Millennium brought about by the surrender there have been eighty-two attacks on police involving many murders; there have been thirty-four attacks upon your military officers. That is the return for your generosity in letting out all the people who were burning timber-yards and hayricks . . . even in this country." And he went on to describe Ireland left derelict "without the pretext or shadow of any legal Government"—cattle driven, lands taken, men and women murdered over the whole country, Ireland relapsing into chaos and old night.

It was natural that the Government should resent these damaging interventions: Lord Carson being a Lord of Appeal, it was scandalous that he should intrude upon politics. The Lord Chancellor touched delicately on the point in the course of debate.

Lord Carson took him up: "Does he suggest that he can be political, and as a judge unchallenged, whereas I cannot be political because I would be challenged as a judge?"

Lord Birkenhead, thus put on his defence, could only reply that the Lord Chancellor was an exception to a general rule: he founded himself not upon logic, but upon "the ripe experience of our ancestors over six centuries."

Lord Haldane came to the assistance of Lord Birkenhead. "It is difficult," he said, "to combine the functions of a judge and a politician."

"You do it," remarked Lord Salisbury.

Thus began the great debate on whether or no a Law Lord could take part in politics. The defence was aggravated by a speech which Carson made at Burton-on-Trent from the same platform as his old friend Colonel Gretton. Carson had said that it was time to end the Coalition and return to the more honest party system before Mr. Lloyd George completely destroyed the Conservative Party. He pointed the case with a reference to the desertion of friends and principles by Austen Chamberlain and Lord Birkenhead, and made a jest about "Diehards" and "Livehards" which was generally condemned in Coalition circles as in doubtful taste.

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This was more than the Lord Chancellor could stand; at the next sitting of the House of Lords he heavily rebuked Carson, in his absence. It was intolerable in a judge to make "bitter, if dull, taunts against individual members of His Majesty's Government and deliver what is in every respect, and in all its aspects, a crude partisan political attack upon the policy of the Government."<sup>1</sup>

Two days later Carson rose in his place to reply to this censure. He denied that there was any rule against judges taking part in politics. He cited the case of Lord Cairns, a Lord Justice who had made fifty-five speeches on Disraeli's Reform Act, "one of the most controversial political matters of the day," and of Lord Macnaghten, a Lord of Appeal, who had fought the Irish Bills for many years. There was the case of the Lord Chancellor, "who presides, when politics give him time, over the hearing of appeals in your Lordships' house. Does he taint justice? He is the most political one of all, and, what is more, he is engaged in working out policies." There were the ex-Lord Chancellors, who made political speeches every week and took part in elections. There were Judges and Records in the House of Commons. What about Chairmen of Quarter Sessions and Justices of the Peace?

Carson made sarcastic reference to Lord Curzon: "When I was first welcomed to Your Lordships' House by the noble Marquess the Leader of the House he did me the kindness to express a wish that I should take part in all the proceedings of the House. . . . I am sure the noble Marquess has not in the slightest degree repented of his expressed wish because of the fact that I have been unable to concur in the policy which he has advocated in relation to Ireland."

Moreover Carson had made sure of his ground beforehand by consulting Lord Birkenhead.

"Before I ever spoke in the House . . . I asked the Lord Chancellor to see me and I told him this: 'I am at the same time a Law Lord and a judge, but I am also a Covenantant.' I said that nothing on earth would induce me to break my Covenant, and that if I was not free to do all I could for Ulster . . . I would be quite willing to resign.' The Lord Chancellor assured me that

<sup>1</sup> Parl. Deb., Lords, vol. xlix., c. 908 (27th March, 1922).

there was no reason for that, and I understand I had the fullest liberty, as had any other Peer, to take part in the political controversy relating to Ulster."

He was willing to resign "if your Lordships say I have done anything that is wrong. What do you think I care for my office, or salary as compared with my honour. . . . If you condemn my action condemn it on solid ground. Draw . . . the distinction, if it is to be drawn, between myself and others who are carrying on the law; but believe me that as long as I hold my present office . . . you may remain perfectly sure that the honour of justice will remain untarnished."

The Lord Chancellor made a long reply in which he drew fine distinctions between Lord Chancellors and Law Lords, between Recorders and Judges. Lord Dunedin took one side; Lord Finlay took another: there were references to Lord Sumner, a Lord of Appeal who had made political speeches on India, and Lord Atkinson, another Law Lord who had made political speeches on Ireland, to Lord Cairns, Lord Macnaghten and Lord Robertson, Law Lords who had all been prominent in politics. Lord Curzon, still writhing a little in retrospect, regretted that Lord Carson should have interpreted his liberty "with a considerable degree of latitude, importing into our proceedings a declamation and invective and methods of interruption in debate which are somewhat foreign to the ordinary proceedings of Your Lordships' House." There was a convention, there was a sense of decorum, and if there was no rule, their Lordships might be driven to make one.

It was an empty threat: no rule could be drawn which would have had to admit so many exceptions. "It is the very nature of the House of Lords," said Lord Salisbury, "that we are all equals. We must not make these distinctions." Otherwise what would have to be done about the "extreme and most formidable partisan, the Lord Chancellor"?

## CHAPTER XLV

### *Carson and the Carlton Club*

Anarchy in the South - War on Belfast - The McMahons - Dead March in *Saul* - The lash - Belleek and Pettigo - The Carlton Club meeting - Carson and Bonar Law - A year of hell - Quarrels and reconciliations.

THINGS fell out in Ireland as Carson had prophesied. Disorder spread with every step of the British withdrawal until the South was reduced to a raging anarchy. Landless peasants robbed the farmers of their land and cattle and parcelled out the demesnes of the gentry, who themselves were burnt out or massacred. The Terrorists of the Irish Republican Army declared against the Treaty and De Valera incited them to "wade in blood" to freedom. Faction fought against faction with the more zest because in the hurly-burly they were destroying the property of the Loyalists and the monuments of a British government. Before the issue of who should succeed to the power of the Crown was decided the Four Courts, the Kildare Street Club, the greater part of Sackville Street, and the finest houses in the countryside were either sacked or reduced to ruins.

In the debates on the Free State (Agreement) Bill on the 10th March, the 11th of May and 18th July, 1922, Carson strongly and bitterly protested against this surrender of law and order in Ireland. "How glibly and easily," he said, "we in London do away with all those things and then go out to the theatre and enjoy ourselves." He denounced the doctrine of the Lord Chancellor that such sufferings were inevitable to every "great revolution," and he turned upon the Archbishops of Canterbury and York (who supported the Treaty) with the case of the venerable Dean of Leighlin, who had been dragged out of his house in the City of Cavan and battered to death in front of his door. Why give all their sympathy to the Armenians, the Greeks and the Russians when such things were happening to their fellow Protestants in Ireland? And he cited besides the case of

a lady who had been outraged by seven or eight of the ruffians who were raiding the house of her husband.

With the South thus at their mercy, Sinn Fein pressed the attack upon the North. In the latter part of March 1922, they opened what they called an "intensive war" on Belfast. From the boundaries of the Nationalist quarter gunmen swept the neighbouring streets and bombs were thrown into tramcars loaded with workmen on their way to and from the shipbuilding yards. Every night works and buildings were set afire by incendiaries; one bomb, thrown into a group of children at skipping-rope in a crowded street, killed two little girls and wounded twenty; another bomb, thrown into a cottage, made sad havoc of the family within. Blows were struck in the dark; none could say who struck them. The Protestant mob, roused to a blind fury, invaded the Catholic quarter killing and burning, while the Government impartially laboured to restore order. Sir James Craig did not deny that "Roman Catholic outrages" were followed by "Protestant" reprisals; but he insisted that in every case the first attacks were made by "Roman Catholic elements" instigated or imported from across the Border.

Desperate men among the Loyalists organised their own secret societies to counter the terrorism of the I.R.A. Doubtless to avenge the shooting of two special constables in that quarter of the town, a gang of masked men went to the house of one Owen McMahon, a Roman Catholic publican in the Antrim Road district. In answer to their knocking McMahon came down in his nightshirt and found them already inside. They locked the womenfolk into a room by themselves, and took McMahon and his six sons, and his barman, one Frank McKinney, into the parlour, there told them to recommend their souls to God, and then shot them, one after another. Only one, a little boy, contrived to escape by dodging the bullets under the table and sofa. Such was the massacre of the McMahons.

Battles were fought over the dead, as, for example, at the funeral of Robert Beattie, postman, Orangeman and ex-soldier, shot while going his rounds. The hearse was followed by a long train of postmen in uniform and Orangemen in their black coats and bright sashes; a brass band played the Dead March in *Saul*;

an armoured turret car and a caged Lancia manned by armed police protected the cortège. As this solemn and formidable procession moved slowly through the centre of the city the gunmen poured in a volley from Donegal Lane, whereupon the military picket charged down the lane with fixed bayonets firing as they went. Again, as the funeral was passing along Royal Avenue, fire was opened upon it from Kent Street, and the turret car returned the fire from its machine guns. But the procession did not break its ranks nor alter its pace; it moved on with the outraged dignity of death. . . .<sup>1</sup>

In Belfast, "everything," as Joe Devlin said, "is religious or irreligious." So we may judge from a typical report sent by Sir James Craig to Mr. Churchill (then Colonial Secretary) on 25th May, 1922: "Situation in Belfast still extremely grave; fierce fighting during the night between police and rebel forces in vicinity of North Street and Carrick Hill . . . five bombs thrown from Roman Catholic area at tramcars full of shipyard workers . . . bomb also thrown at Lancia car . . . tramcar destroyed by incendiaries . . . St. Silas National School, Protestant, attacked by incendiaries . . . Messrs. Grieves' flax mills, Protestant, set on fire . . . fire brigade forced back by armed men . . . Carnegie Library set on fire . . . three killed and twenty wounded." On Sunday, 28th May, *The Times* correspondent at Belfast reported twenty-two outbreaks of fire since the previous Friday, "directed chiefly against Protestant business premises in Roman Catholic areas." Nor did Sinn Féin confine its attentions to Belfast. In the latter part of May bands of desperadoes in motor cars swept over Down and Antrim, attacking and burning the country houses in their wild career.

The Belfast Government, however, were not easily daunted. On the 22nd of May, W. J. Twaddell, a member of the Northern Parliament and of the Belfast Corporation, was murdered in the streets of the city. Fourteen people were killed in the riots that followed. Sir James Craig sternly rebuked the rioters. "Let justice and retribution rest," he said, "on the high authority of the land." On the 24th of May he proclaimed the I.R.A. in Northern Ireland. He and his Government were not only resolute but practical. They procured a hulk in the harbour and

<sup>1</sup> See *The Times*, 17th May, 1922.



turned it into a prison; they passed a law instituting the punishment of the lash for carrying guns or bombs. Sinn Fein complained bitterly of these innovations upon the dignity of private war; Roman Catholic ladies went in deputation to Sir James Craig; Michael Collins protested to the British Government; but Craig was not to be moved either by threats or cajoleries; a brace of stout sailors cheerfully laid the cat-o'-nine tails across the backs of both Catholic and Protestant gunmen. It worked like a charm. Some hundreds of indignant patriots presently trooped out of Belfast and made for the South, where they settled like a flock of vultures upon a disarmed and a defenceless prey.

In the meanwhile Craig had called in Sir Henry Wilson to organise the defences of the Province. A strong force of Royal Ulster Constabulary, well officered and well armed, systematically cleaned up the six counties. When the Republican army invaded Fermanagh and established itself in Belleek and Pettigo the affront was more than the British Government could stomach. Mr. Winston Churchill records that Mr. Lloyd George was even then against strong measures: "An issue," he argued, "fought on Ulster would not command united British opinion, still less world-wide opinion." Mr. Churchill, however, had more spirit, and the British army received orders to drive out the invaders, which was easily done with a few shells from the artillery. This was on the 4th of June, 1922, and on the 22nd of that month Sinn Fein took its revenge by the murder of Sir Henry Wilson outside his own door in Eaton Place.

These events, as may be supposed, worked powerfully to the discredit of the Coalition. Mr. Bonar Law, when the Treaty was debated in the House of Commons, had given it his support, but had referred propitiatingly to Carson, whose friendship, "the closest of his political life," he still hoped to retain. If there had been, he had said, an attempt—as for a time there seemed to be—to compel Ulster to go into an All-Ireland Parliament, he would have been one of those to ask the country to condemn such a policy. It was a little flick of the whip, not lost, we may be certain, upon the Prime Minister.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> House of Commons, 15th December, 1921.

Now Bonar Law, at that time, had "a very special place as Adviser Extraordinary of the Unionist Party."<sup>1</sup> He had, indeed, retired from the Government and the leadership of the Party, but not from Parliament, and the events in Ireland were a heavy burden upon his Presbyterian conscience. We have seen how Mr. Lloyd George did not dare to proceed to extremes with Ulster because of this restraining influence, and after the murder of Wilson, Bonar Law plainly stated that the limit of concession and delay had been reached. He spoke for the major part of the Conservatives, if not in the House then in the country.

Time was bringing in certain other revenges upon the head of the Prime Minister. He had instigated Venizelos against Turkey, and the Greeks had suffered heavy defeat in consequence. A traffic in honours was being aired in the Press and investigated in Committee and the veteran Lord Rosebery asked some awkward questions about a "Personal Fund" to which Mr. Lloyd George stood in ill-defined and invidious relationship. All these and many other discontents came to a concentration in the Carlton Club.

Lord Ronaldshay, in his *Life of Lord Curzon*, records that on the morning of the 18th October, 1922, the Secretary of State found Bonar Law "depressed and worried by the appeals which were being made to him to thrust himself once more into the forefront of public life. . . . So distasteful was the prospect that Lord Curzon left him seriously thinking of resigning his seat in the House of Commons and retiring finally from public life." Later in the day, however, when Lord Curzon saw him again, "all had changed." "He had resolved or been persuaded to assume the lead." Next day, with the assistance of Mr. Baldwin, Bonar Law took charge of the meeting and forced the resignation of the Government. "What occurred," asks Mr. Taylor, "to work this sudden change in Bonar Law's state of mind?"<sup>2</sup> We cannot answer this question with certainty; but a letter written by Bonar Law to Carson at the time offers at least a wide solution:

<sup>1</sup> *The Times*, August 5th, 1922 (Political Notes).

<sup>2</sup> *The Strange Case of Andrew Bonar Law*, by H. A. Taylor, p. 259.

" 24 Onslow Gardens, S.W.7.

" 22nd October, 1922.

" MY DEAR CARSON,—When I got your note I was in the throes of indecision and I immediately rang up your house to see if I could have a talk with you.

" Well—I took the plunge and I believe that it was the right thing to do—but I shall have a bad time. I am sure that you will try to make things easy so far as it is possible for you to do so. Even my family with the doubtful exception of my sister turned against me and would not hear of my resigning my seat which was the only alternative to what I did.

" Yours ever,

" A. BONAR LAW."

Carson, let us remember, had worked strongly ever since the Treaty, publicly and privately, to bring the Coalition down. He was indeed the first to broach the subject in a public speech. Thus at Canterbury, on the 14th January, 1922, he had warned the Conservative Party that the intrigues and policy of the Prime Minister had already demoralised their leaders and would destroy their Party. " Let us," he had pleaded, " start afresh, however small may be the nucleus." Throughout the year, Carson had been working to this end. Bonar Law, on the other hand, had been, as his nature was, indecisive; we have seen him still hesitating on the eve of the event. And knowing how he leaned upon the strong arm of his friend, we may suppose, with this letter before us, that it was Carson who decided Bonar Law to make an end of the Coalition. The same hand which had raised Lloyd George to power brought about his fall.

There is ground also for saying that it was the Irish Treaty, more than any other single cause, which brought about the fall of the Coalition. " It is, however, some consolation," said Carson in his sardonic way, " that Mr. Austen Chamberlain, then supposed to be a Unionist leader, has said that it was from the moment of the signing of this Treaty that the Coalition began to topple down. Of course it was, and I am glad of it. It is the just reward of the treachery of which he was at the head, and so may it always be. . . ." <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Parl. Deb., Lords, vol. lli., c. 225 (4th December, 1922).

Carson could hardly have hoped that the change of Government would lead to a restoration of the British power in Ireland. He had himself admitted in the spring of the year that the position was lost. "To use a common phrase," he had said, "'the game is up.' I know well, as every man knows, that when your superior officers have opened the gates of a beleaguered city to the enemy, and allowed their troops to enter, the position is hopeless. And that is what our leaders have done." All he could have expected was a change in the spirit and the direction of the policy.

Nor do we know what passed between him and Bonar Law upon this subject after the elections had placed his friend at the head of the new Government. There is only a hint of the old mild obstinacy in a letter from Bonar dated the 2nd November, 1922: "Many thanks for your note. I did my best to prevent this trouble and you may be sure that everything you feel compelled to do will not be regarded by me as unfriendly for I know how friendly you are." Later in the month the Irish Free State Constitution Bill was introduced by the Prime Minister and rapidly pushed through the House of Commons, and Carson in the Lords protested in vain against the abandonment of his unfortunate friends in the South of Ireland. He pointed out that at every stage Parliament had been prevented from interfering on the pretext that the Bill embodied a treaty, how it was in reality a surrender, with no more than the pretext of terms, to "the powers of organised anarchy and murder that existed in Ireland." "I have merely made these observations," he went on, "in order that the many hundreds of people who have written to me . . . may understand that it would be useless for me on their behalf, even if I had the power to do so, to attempt to alter one line or one comma in a constitution for Ireland in which neither the House of Commons nor this House, nor indeed the British Government, have had a single voice."<sup>1</sup>

It is evident that Carson was stirred to the depths of his soul by indignation, horror and pity. Murder was always to him a thing most foul and hateful. He saw in this rebellion not a national struggle for freedom but a criminal movement with motives of class-hatred and spoliation. He knew his Ireland and

<sup>1</sup> Parl. Deb., Lords, vol. lli., c. 175 (1st December, 1922).

had faced long ago the sort of ruffian who had since usurped its government. He knew also his own people, their fidelity and their sufferings; that brilliant, brave and loyal minority which had served the British cause so well.

"To those who were loyal to you in Ireland," he said, "it has been a year of hell. It is still hell. . . . During that year almost every house of any importance in Ireland has been burnt down. Men have been taken out of their beds because they served you in the war . . . or as those whom you selected to put down crime—taken out one after the other and shot dead. All law has vanished from Ireland. All protection is at an end in Ireland. . . . I personally can thank God that nearly all my relatives have been able to come away, and that is the only consolation they can have as a reward for having been loyal subjects of the Crown."

Carson went on to describe some harrowing cases of those less fortunate, which had come within his own knowledge. Hundreds of them, he said, had been brought before him from day to day:

"I saw a gentleman from Ireland the other day and he told me that his wife had been to a hospital in Dublin to see a patient, and that she came away from the hospital with a broken heart because she found the hospital full of ravished ladies. Even that, probably the basest of all crimes, has become a commonplace in Ireland at the present time."

He quoted the words of an Irish priest (Jesuit and Sinn Feiner)—"Men shoot their fellow-countrymen with apparently as little compunction as would be felt in shooting a pheasant or a snipe before . . . Ireland is more like an asylum now than a gaol, but an asylum where even mental aberration cannot foster hope."

Their Lordships knew of their greatest soldier, "foully murdered on his own doorstep." But that was not the only tragedy in his family. The beautiful old home of the Wilsons had shortly afterwards been burnt down. "The brother of the gallant soldier is now living in humble lodgings in an English village, shattered in health and broken in spirit. I saw him lately, and I assure you it was hard to bear—the wreckage which all this had brought about."

Carson cited other cases: "I have read within the last two days an account, relating to a lonely part of Galway, of marauders going in, burning down a church there, then calmly walking over and burning down the rectory, and not being satisfied, burning down the schools. What do you think that means in that little district with only scattered Protestants? It means the wiping out of the community."

He had read the day before of the looting of a fine mansion in County Louth belonging to Sir Edward Harland: "It was full of priceless things, and they brought up carts and horses, and those who were too poor to have horses and carts brought donkeys. They stripped it of everything they could get, and walked away in broad daylight. . . . And nothing is done."

He spoke of old people—fine ladies in their day—reduced to such penury that there was nothing for them but the workhouse. He mentioned the case of one lady, over eighty years of age, who had lived in her family place for sixty years: "They took the old lady out of bed, and would not allow her to put on her clothes. They brought her down, and put her standing in her nightdress upon the lawn in the middle of the night, in order that she might be a spectator of the burning down of all that she had lived with during her whole life, and of everything she cared for in the whole world."

Lord Birkenhead had said that however bloody was the road they must go along it—"How easy it is for those who have not to travel the bloody road to make that kind of observation!"

Thus Lord Carson pleaded for those broken remnants of a great community. As they could not have justice let them at least have charity. "They want it now, and after all, it is not a very great price to pay. You have agreed to a revolution in Ireland. Do not do it on the cheap."

In this cause Carson was persistent and indefatigable: his influence greatly helped to procure both private and public help and Government relief, although all that could be done made but little difference to that sum of human misery.

Carson could not but feel a shudder of distaste when he heard his old friend Campbell (by that time Lord Glenavy), who had so often informed him of the horrid progress of Sinn Féin in the destruction of British law and order, use flattering words

of the Sinn Fein Government. "The eulogiums he pronounced upon them," said Carson bitterly, "led me to the conclusion that he would wind up by saying that he himself intended to transfer his pension as an ex-Lord Chancellor of Ireland from the Consolidated Fund to the Irish Fund administered by the Provisional Government." Glenavy might no doubt have replied that as he had been abandoned by England he could not be blamed for making his peace with Sinn Fein. He was not the only man who had to follow such a distasteful course. In May 1922, a deputation of 230 Synods of the Church of Ireland, led by the Archbishop of Dublin, the Bishop of Cashel and Sir William Goulding, had waited upon Michael Collins and had asked to be informed if they were to be permitted to live in Ireland or if it was desired that they should leave the country. And Collins, while drawing their attention to the "revolting murders of Catholics in Belfast," had graciously (but ineffectively) promised them protection.<sup>1</sup>

There was, indeed, in all this as much bitterness as misery for a loyal Irishman. Carson found cause for quarrel with most of his old friends and colleagues. It was long before he could bring himself to speak to Birkenhead. But one rainy night as he was about to drive home from the House of Lords, he saw "F. E." waiting on the pavement.

"Jump in," Carson said to him, "and I'll drive you home."

They sat together for a while in silence, and then Birkenhead said—"You know, Carson, some of the things you said hit me hard."

"You surprise me," said Carson.

"Yes," said Birkenhead, "and perhaps you don't know why they hit me so hard. It was because they were so damnably true."

"And how could you keep up a quarrel with a man like that?" Carson would say, and certainly with Carson it was difficult to keep up any quarrel. He felt some bitterness towards Bonar Law for a while; but skilful co-operation between Lady Carson and Miss Law in the end brought them together. But there were others whom he found it more difficult to forgive.

<sup>1</sup> Michael Collins, who himself had been "wanted" upon sixteen charges of murder, lost his life in the attempt to restore law and order in Ireland.

## CHAPTER XLVI

### *Work in the Lords*



The great betrayal - Compensation - Safeguards - Statute of Westminster - Moneylenders Bill - The Prayer Book - Carson resigns.

"THERE is nothing," said Lord Carson in one of his speeches in the House of Lords, "that England likes better than forgetting. It is easy to forget, particularly if it costs nothing." He was referring to the wrongs, the losses, the complaints and the claims of that persecuted remnant, the Irish Loyalists, which form the staple of his speeches in the House of Lords from the time he entered it down to 1929, when illness and advancing years set a term to his working life.

Carson had reason to be indignant. The Government in its evacuation of Ireland had withdrawn its protection from its loyal subjects and servants, and had left them to the vengeance of their enemies. This abandonment went so far as to strip them of the justice they had received at the hands of the Courts before the Administration was transferred. In a secret document called "Heads of Working Arrangement for Implementing the Treaty" which Carson read out in the House of Lords, it was provided that "all proceedings . . . including . . . the enforcement of decrees be barred." As Carson showed in the course of a terrible recital many Loyalists, injured in person, purse and property, had obtained, at the risk of assassination, decrees in the lawful courts. By this transaction between the outgoing and incoming Governments, these decrees were made of no effect. This surrender of His Majesty's justice to the wronged seemed to Carson the basest part of a great betrayal.

Carson pressed these grievances on a succession of embarrassed Governments with the power of a great advocate and the pathos of a compassionate heart. There was no lack of material. "I receive," he said, "from sixty to seventy complaints every week." Many of them were from personal friends. "I can vouch



for this lady," he said of one complainant, "because I have known her ever since I was five years old." "My only consolation," he said, "is that my own family connections have contrived to escape from Ireland." Those generous and hospitable mansions, whose blackened ruins were the subject of many of these appeals—he had himself in the old days enjoyed their hospitality and there were, besides, a multitude of poor and humble people left stranded and forlorn whose sufferings touched him just as nearly. Thus he read a letter from the widow of a Sergeant of the Royal Irish Constabulary who had been murdered. The widow had been awarded £3,000 compensation—£1,500 for herself and £1,500 for her children. "When he died," she wrote to Carson, "I was left, I may say, on the streets. . . . I was a walking ghost; but God brought me safely through." She and her children had been compassionately fed by the English Government, but she could get no satisfaction of her claim.

What remained to those wretched people was an appeal to the Wood-Renton Commission, which considered their cases not as a matter of right but as a matter of grace, and allowed them a mere fraction of their awards. In one of the many cases which Carson produced, the Recorder of Cork had allowed £2,000 upon a claim of £3,500 for stock-in-trade stolen or destroyed. This award was revised by the Commission and reduced to £77. "Fortunately," said Carson, "in anything connected with my country there is always some slight cause for amusement. They had the grace to allow some shillings by way of interest, and deducted Income Tax to the amount of 7s. 8d."

In another case the house of a prominent Irish Loyalist had been raided by what General O'Duffy called "mutinous troops." The gentleman and his son had stood in the hall as the ruffians tried to force their way in and had shot six of them down as they entered, one after another. After that to remain in Ireland meant death, and as the refugee had held several very considerable appointments he put in a claim for £37,000. All that he could get was a decree for £80 in respect of damaged furniture.

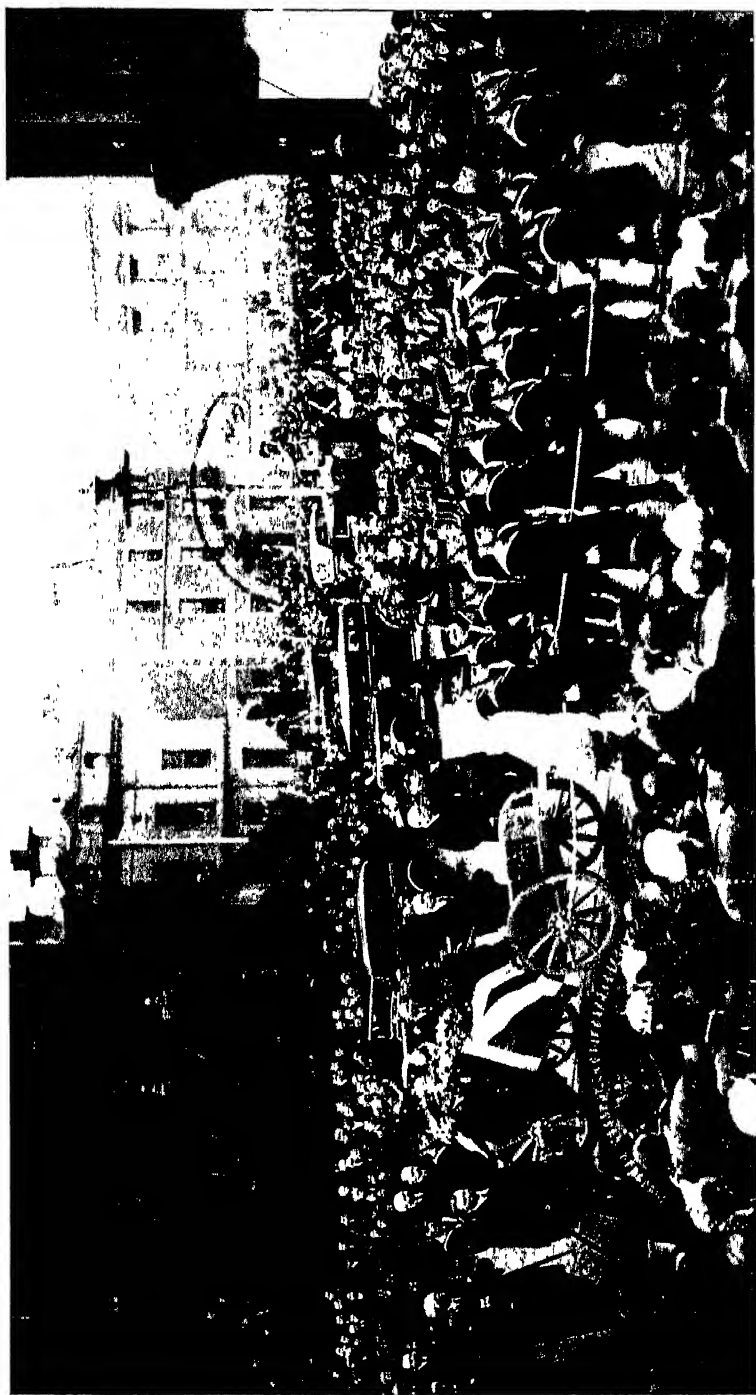
Carson protested strongly against the methods of the Wood-Renton Commission, whose inspectors, he said, went round to claimants with such proposals as in a case which he quoted:

"If you will take £4,000 to settle, you can have it. Admittedly your property is worth £20,000; but if you insist on going on and getting the value of your property, we will put a condition upon you that you must rebuild. . . . Their suggestion really amounts to this: 'You have been driven out of Ireland; your house has been burnt, your furniture has been destroyed; you have probably been shot at and your wife and family have been in danger. You must come back and rebuild your house and live among the people who threw you out.' Am I right in describing that as a farce?"<sup>1</sup>

Such were the grievances which Carson pressed year in year out upon the attention of successive Governments, and it may be said that his importunity was in many cases effective, although neither he nor the British Government nor any human power could undo the harm which had been done. The minority were doomed when they were deserted by the Power which had planted them. "It is the sinfullest thing in the world," said Bacon, "to forsake or destitute a plantation once in forwardness; for, besides the dishonour, it is the guiltiness of blood of many commiserable persons."

Carson, being a Member of the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council, knew the value of one safeguard of the subject in Ireland, his right to state a case for leave to appeal to that tribunal, which was implicit in the Treaty. But when certain British ex-Civil Servants in Ireland brought and won their case before that Court, the Free State Government still denied them justice. When Carson brought the matter up in the House of Lords, Lord Plymouth explained that the British Government were meeting the difference between what was allowed by the Free State Government and what was awarded by the Court. Carson protested<sup>2</sup> against this easy method of compromising justice, and again, in the last or almost the last speech which he made in the House of Lords, he drew attention to the defiance of Mr. Blythe, the Free State Minister of Finance, who had said that his Government would take measures to make ineffective any appeal from Ireland to the Privy Council. Why, he asked

<sup>1</sup> *Parl. Deb., H. of L., vol. liv., cc. 702 et seq. (28th June, 1928) vol. lviii., cc. 640 et seq. (16th July, 1924), etc.*  
<sup>2</sup> *H. of L., February 6th, 1929, and February 21st, 1929.*



FUNERAL OF LORD CARSON. THE CORTÈGE PASSING THROUGH BELFAST

indignantly, were the British Government always yielding to blackmail? "Why should we always pat on the back, and always lick the boots of, people who were always insulting us and the Government?"<sup>1</sup>

The British Government, nevertheless, yielded that which it lacked the power or the nerve to maintain. In November 1931 we find Carson joining with Lord Danesfort, Colonel John Gretton and some others to press for the reservation of Irish Treaty rights under the Statute of Westminster. But in vain. The Statute was made law, and using the power so given the Irish Free State Government swept away the last safeguard of the British subject in Ireland.<sup>2</sup>

There was another matter which had long exercised the mind and the heart of Carson—the evil of usury. Things were personal with Carson: he had had an evil experience of moneylenders which helps us to understand why he framed his Moneylenders Bill. "I was led," he said in introducing the measure, "into the inquiry by having to go into a number of dealings with moneylenders with reference to my own family, though I am thankful to say that from the early stage of my own career, when I commenced without a shilling in the world, I never had personal dealings with a moneylender."

Carson told a sympathetic House of Lords how the downward career began. "My young relative," he said, "began to back horses of which he knew nothing. He got into difficulties, and at once the bookmaker said to him: 'Oh, that need not stop you; I know a jolly good moneylender.' He carried on the transaction for some four years, until, as a result, he had paid back the whole sum he borrowed plus 50 per cent at compound interest and still owed £600."

There were some in the House of Lords who doubted if much good would come from an interference even with this extreme case of the law of supply and demand. "The moneylenders," said Lord Haldane, "arise from a source which you cannot get

<sup>1</sup> H. of L., December 8rd, 1929.

<sup>2</sup> The Statute of Westminster gave to the Irish Free State a power under which they could abrogate the Treaty and, as a matter of law, they have availed themselves of that power. *Judgment of the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council in the case of Moore v. the Attorney-General of the Irish Free State*. June 6th, 1932. But see article, "Secession by Innuendo" by J. H. Morgan, K.C., in the *National Review*, March 1936.

rid of and which will re-appear at another part of the ground in a different form." And Lord Darling, to illustrate the difficulty of defining an unconscionable rate of interest, quoted Baron Bramwell's famous interrogatory: "Upon what terms would you lend a mutton-chop to a starving dog?" Both, however, supported Carson's measure, which was carefully framed not to suppress but to regulate the moneylending business.

Carson had in mind that usury was often akin to blackmail. "The moment," he said, "the moneylender knows that a man is in Government employment . . . he knows that by an exposure he can entirely destroy the career of the official who has been unfortunate enough to get into his clutches. . . . He knows that if there is a father or mother, an uncle or an aunt . . . they will pay up rather than allow their relative to suffer." How often had Carson himself paid up to save his graceless son! "That," he said, "is how moneylending is akin to blackmail on many occasions."

Instrumental to this system of blackmail was the threat of the Bankruptcy Court, and Carson offered the borrower the remedy of taking the case to the County Court on the plea that the transaction was unconscionable, putting it on the moneylender to justify any rate of interest over 15 per cent. Nor were any proceedings in bankruptcy to be taken on a moneylender's bill unless the case had first gone through the County Court.

There were other reforms. Moneylenders were in the habit of adding compound interest or doubling it upon default so as to leave the case of the borrower "absolutely hopeless," and Carson laid it down that "a bill ought to be good for the sum actually advanced, and the interest ought to be stated in clear terms on the face of the bill." Carson, moreover, provided against the then intolerable nuisance of moneylenders' circulars.<sup>1</sup>

On the 18th December, 1927, the House was so crowded with Members and spectators that there was a queue in the Lobby and the Throne was "masked by a black cordon of spectators." This unaccustomed throng had come to hear or take part in a controversy which strangely stirred the English heart—over the "deposited book." Carson being an Irishman brought up in the Church of Ireland, it was almost inevitable that he should

<sup>1</sup> Parl. Deb., H. of L., vol. lx., cc. 529 *et seq.* (17th March, 1925).

take the Protestant or "Low Church" side, but even his friends were unprepared for the strength of his conviction. Carson's life, indeed, had always glowed round a core of earnest faith. As a law student at Trinity College he used to preach at street corners of a Sunday night; his religion was something very deep and very dearly cherished. "Remember," he said in the House of Lords on this occasion, "that religion is a thing that you learn at your Mother's knee. I say that without disrespect to any of the right rev. prelates. Any religion I ever learned was from my Mother, and it is to me one of the most precious possessions."

So it was that after venturing "as a member of a sister Church, the Irish Church, which has, up to this time, been in communion with the Church of England, to ask your Lordships to hear me for a few moments," Carson proceeded to deliver one of the strongest and most eloquent speeches of the debate against the alternative prayer-book. He took the view that any change in a book which generations had loved and honoured would merely disturb belief without harmonising practice. Why, he asked, was a proposal to legalise illegalities to be called reform? Better disestablishment than surrender to schismatics who were seeking to undermine the Reformation. To grace all this earnestness there was not wanting a touch of humour, as when he quoted a friend who had said to him: "I suppose the next thing is that we shall have an alternative Bradshaw."<sup>1</sup>

To his friend Dr. D'Arcy, the Primate, Carson wrote at length on the subject. "What I have very strongly felt," he wrote, "was that a good deal of the change in the alternating common service, coupled with the Reservation provisions, would leave it open to those who wished to defy the rubrics to make a justification for going much further than was contemplated by the compilers of the deposited book and in my view an alternative Communion Service goes to the very root of disunity. I do not think the Bishops understand how deep the feeling amongst the masses is, even amongst those who, one might say, are not much concerned in religion in an active sense, that any change which may lead to a modification of the Reformation Settlement should be opposed." There is much more to the same effect, but

<sup>1</sup> Parl. Deb., H. of L., vol. lxix., cc 866, *et seq.*

with a certain pleasant note of deprecation as to a spiritual superior: "May I assure you," the letter ends, "of my most complete confidence in your guidance: I feel deeply thankful that you are at the head of the Church to help and guide it."

On the 1st November, 1929, it was announced that Lord Carson had resigned the office of Lord of Appeal in Ordinary. He was by that time nearly seventy-six years of age and broken health had a good deal interfered with his work. As a judge he had endeared himself to his colleagues and to counsel by a certain charming modesty and candour which belonged to his character. There was nothing in his bearing either of pomp or pretence: he deferred to his learned brothers and was willing to be corrected even by a junior barrister.

It is the testimony of Bench and Bar and the officers of the Court that Carson was rather a competent than a great judge, rather a shrewd than a profound lawyer. He himself firmly believed and frequently said that the Office of Lord of Appeal was to apply principles to facts: as to the facts themselves it was to be presumed that they had been established in the lower court. But as Carson's strength lay in the handling of facts, his own rule disabled him from the work for which of all others he was best equipped. "He rarely, if ever," says Lord Blanesburgh in a letter to the author, "really spread himself in judgment. The juristic side of the work—and most of it can be so described—did not appeal to him. He should have been Chief Justice. In that office—presiding over a jury at some great trial—he would have been as supreme as in similar circumstances he was at the Bar. But unfortunately for us all that office never came his way, and the judicial office which did was not really according to his humour."

There were at that time three very great lawyers in the House of Lords, Lord Sumner, Lord Dunedin and Lord Buckmaster, and to the transcending intellect of Lord Sumner especially Carson was given to defer. He was with Sumner in the minority in that *cause célèbre* of 1924, the divorce case of *Russell v. Russell*, and in most other cases, although he heard them carefully and conscientiously, he was content to register his agreement with one or other of those great authorities on the principles of English law. So it was also in the Judicial Committee of the Privy

Council, a Court in which he took a jealous pride, as the Supreme Tribunal of the British Empire. That English justice should be called to decide upon such an issue as whether an idol in some Jain temple of India should be clothed or naked was always for Carson a matter of wonder and admiration.



## CHAPTER XLVII

### *The Long Day Closes*

Cleve Court - The monument - India - Credo - Death and burial - Summing up - Key to his policy - As an advocate - Carson the man - Just and compassionate.

IN the course of their visits to Birchington the Carsons had happened on an ancient neglected country house which stood among a ruckle of garden walls and farm buildings sheltered by a clump of beeches just under the almost imperceptible ridge of the Isle of Thanet. The better part of the mansion had been built in the reign of Queen Anne and was a very nice example of the genial architecture of that time; the smaller range of buildings alongside was much older, its russet roofs sunken in furrows and, like Falstaff, "blasted with antiquity." This old pile of rose-red brick had so pleasant an appearance that the Carsons fell in love with and in the end bought it, and Lady Carson, ingenious in such matters, made it bloom again in all its ordered beauty. Inside the house was well designed and richly panelled; outside was a generous stretch of garden and field, and, beyond, the wheatfields, very fine in the Isle of Thanet, sloped a little downwards towards the sea. Before harvest, when they grew tawny like the skin of a lion, there were few prospects more beautiful to Carson's eye than those spacious cornlands with the sun setting behind them and in front a laughing sea dotted with the brown sails of barges. It was a transaction of the autumn of 1920 and, from that time on, Carson spent many serene autumnal days on the lawns and among the roses of Cleve Court.

For ten years, however, he still spent his working terms at his town house in Eaton Place, and there and in the Isle of Thanet nothing pleased him better than to sit with old friends over a cup of tea on the lawn or a glass of port at the dinner-table. As time went on, his interventions in public life became rare; but he could never resist an invitation to Ulster, as for example when he went to Belfast in November 1932, when the Prince of

Wales opened the new Parliament House at Stormont, and again on an occasion peculiar to himself in July 1933.

The people of Ulster never forgot what they owed to Edward Carson, and took a pride in erecting such a monument as would testify their gratitude to all time. On a granite pedestal, in the centre of the park that sweeps down from their beautiful Parliament House, they raised a heroic statue in bronze of their leader, as they always called him. It had been founded by the English sculptor, Leonard Stanford Merrifield, who showed the orator in a mood of passionate earnestness driving home his exhortation with arm upraised.

Carson himself was present when this statue was unveiled. It was a great gathering of old friends, some forty thousand of them. James Craig, by that time Lord Craigavon (himself a block of red granite), recalled how they had chosen Carson to be their leader and had "instantly surrendered to him their confidence and their hearts." What would have happened had he not shouldered the burden of meeting and defeating the enemies of their country?

"I know of no words," Carson replied in broken tones, "to express my gratitude to a great people who all through those years never for one moment deceived or deserted me. . . . I would not if I were going through life again ask God Almighty to give me any greater privilege than to lead people so true and so loyal."

On the 28th of June, 1933, the Conservative Party met at the Friends' House in London to consider the Indian Policy of the Government. Carson, by that time very frail and old, warned the meeting that there never was a safeguard invented which could restrain a Government "created by a franchise which you yourselves have given," and begged his party not to betray loyal friends, servants and officers. ". . . Don't be trying to conciliate your enemies at the expense of your friends. Our friends first, our friends second, our friends always."

This Roman doctrine of statesmanship, Carson's last testimony, was cheered but disregarded by the Conservative Party.

Carson smiled with the sad wisdom of old age when the Press once more rebuked him as an incorrigible reactionary. On the steps of the house of a friend he happened to run into Geoffrey Dawson, whose great newspaper had changed some of its views

since the old times when these two used to meet at the Monday dinners.

"My dear Carson," Dawson said self-accusingly, "what a long time since we've met!"

"Sure, it's not my fault," said Carson, "lying ill at Eaton Place most of the time."

"The truth is," Dawson apologised, "I'm very busy. Why, I've not even had time to read Marjoribank's *Life of you*."

"Indeed, and I can't blame you," Carson replied. "Sure, I haven't read *The Times* these two years."

Carson was well content to let the world go by and enjoy the chat and the reading of his own fireside.

"What authors do you most read?" Lord Haldane asked him.

"Edgar Wallace and P. G. Wodehouse," Carson replied.

"But don't you ever read difficult books?" Haldane asked.

"No, I leave it to you to write them," said Carson.

The pain which no doctor could charm still haunted him in these last days, and his gaunt frame was shaken by frequent illness; but his mind was clear to the end. The tranquil happiness which he found in his second marriage never deserted him. His wife and his son were at hand to cheer him from a mood of depression, and there was besides the wider circle—his daughter, Mrs. Chesterman, his sailor son Walter and his grandchildren.

Carson, moreover, was rich in his friends. He long enjoyed the society of the Middle Temple of which at one time he was Treasurer, and when he grew beyond stirring out of his house there were still old benchers who came to see him, and there were old friends too from Ireland. To one of the dearest of these, the Primate, who visited him in his sick-room, in these last days, Carson said: "I have seen much to shake my faith, and what remains with me is no more than I learned at my mother's knee: 'God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten son . . .'"

"It is enough," said Dr. D'Arcy.

So, lingering out like a long sunset gradually flickering into night, he died very quietly at Cleve Court, with the fall of the leaf, on the 22nd October, 1885. His body was borne to Belfast in one of His Majesty's ships, there to be received by a people

who mourned in him their leader, their friend and the founder of their State, and was laid to rest in St. Anne's Cathedral. Dr. D'Arcy, the Primate of All Ireland, spoke movingly of his old friend as a patriot and a statesman, whose courage was equal to his cause.

There having been so much to tell in this long tale, the teller feels that he has failed to give, when all is said, a clear picture of the man. To understand him we must call to mind his origin—his mother, a Lambert, that is to say a "Cromwellian," his father a professional man of Dublin, a city time out of mind owing much to the English, the capital of the Pale, the centre of English culture, commerce and law. Little more than half a century before his birth the barristers of Dublin had formed a regiment of horse and ridden out to help drive the rebels from a devastated countryside; Carson himself as Crown Prosecutor had faced and quelled a mob which thirsted for his blood. He knew well how thin was the crust of law and order in his country, how easy to break through into pillage and murder. This sense of actual danger to his own people, of dispossession, even of extermination, gave the force of instinct to his politics. "People," he said, "do not easily tire who are fighting for their lives." He fought for the lives of his people.

The Englishman does not understand Ireland if he thinks of the Irish as a nation, or forgets that "Irish Nationalism" was in reality a class-war directed by the lower against the upper elements of society. "Everything that happens from day to day," Carson wrote to his friend Marriott<sup>1</sup> in November 1933, "convinces me more and more that all the elements that had the real power (in Irish Nationalism) were not only anti-English, but are really far from civilised, and in my long experience of the government of that country, I have always felt certain that the parties of disorder would in the long run come to the top."

"I quite agree that in the end it is a question of nationality, and the Celts have done nothing in Ireland but create trouble and disorder. Irishmen who have turned out successful are not in any case that I know of true Celtic origin."

Such ethnical generalisations are dangerous; but it is probable that the best part of the Irish people are of crossed blood and

<sup>1</sup> J. A. R. Marriott, historian and Member for Oxford City.

it is certain that Carson belonged both by blood and tradition to that class or race among whom we number such great Irishmen as Castlereagh and John Fitzgibbon, who devoted themselves to a British cause, believing that there lay the good of Ireland.

As to his connection with Ulster, we have suggested that it began in a point of strategy. Himself a Southern Unionist, Carson saw, with the eye of a great advocate, that the strength of the cause lay in the stubborn resistance of the North, which he hoped to use to "wreck the Home Rule Bill." His policy was not merely to save the Six Counties but the Union; he was driven to concentrate on the minor issue by the force of events, and won the game but lost the rubber.

For his organisation of resistance in arms, he has been called a rebel, although his force never shed blood, nor ever opposed itself to the law of the land, but kept the peace through troubled times. It may be admitted, however, that he and his people would have fought if the attempt had actually been made to put them under the authority of an Irish Parliament. If these pages have not shown good reason for that resolution it is vain to attempt it now. "If the Ulster people rebelled," said a journalist of that time, "they rebelled as honest Kent rebelled when Lear in his senile frenzy banished his loving daughter from his threshold and divided his kingdom among the enemies of his own household. . . . If Ulster erred it was in excess of devotion, which we take to be no sin, but a rare virtue. . . . For it was England that placed in Ulster this little garrison of her own sons to support her cause and maintain her flag."<sup>1</sup>

The Celts were great orators and some Celtic admixture in his blood may have made Carson one of the two greatest advocates of his day, his only equal being another Irishman—Russell. They had both the same daemonic force. Carson owed much to a personality which dominated the court, to a style instantaneously impressive, to the deep thrilling voice with its rich intonations, and to a courage in which he was greatly the superior of his chief antagonist, Rufus Isaacs. But it would be unfair to forget the powerful intellect which took a strong hold upon the facts, and the careful preparation beforehand.

<sup>1</sup> *Morning Post*, "Sir Edward Carson," January 27th, 1921.

Thus, in a case where a man was accused of complicity in certain frauds, Carson jotted down half a dozen incriminating phrases on an old envelope and then skilfully led his unsuspecting victim into the use of every one of them, one after another.

Of the man, we can say he was of a nature simple, strong and passionate, easy and generous, as quick to forgive as to resent an injury. He was always himself, neither cold nor unreal, so that men said, "You knew where you had him," and even in politics, which are full of malice, there were few who disliked him. He had, however, moods of depression, intensified by a neuralgic pain in the middle of his body, which returned like a familiar and haunted him through life. But for this handicap there is no saying how far he would have gone or where he would have stopped; as it was, he was blamed for continually drawing back where his friends would have had him go forward. "He is like a Derby favourite," the late Lady Londonderry said of him, "who, when you have him saddled and bridled and ready to lead out of the paddock, won't run." And yet when he seemed completely prostrate he could be fired to his greatest effort.

When we think of Carson in his prime, we recall something electric, dynamic, vital—stepping, for example, off the Stranraer boat on to the Belfast quay, eying the crowd with a wary vigilance, swinging a blackthorn, a thin, supple, sinewy, 6ft.-lin. figure—something of steel in the whole aspect of the man—with his soft black felt hat at a raking angle over one eye.

Carson was called ruthless, but there was a quality which he strove to conceal, a tenderness of heart. For the small, for the weak, for the poor, for the oppressed, he had a wonderful benignity. When he resigned office in 1916 over the untoward fate of Serbia there were those who thought it a mere pretext; but, although there were other reasons also, it is certain that he felt the fall of Serbia almost as a personal grief. He could see in his mind's eye that small people being driven headlong; but what troubled him most was that his Government had failed them: that he could not reconcile with his honour. And so it was that, when Russia fell, he was the only member of the Cabinet who wanted to advise Roumania to make a separate peace: as it was, he argued, hopeless to resist, let her not share the fate of Serbia. And one great reason why he so strongly

opposed Home Rule was because he so clearly understood in what the happiness of the poor peasantry of Ireland consisted. Under the Union they enjoyed their own, they were prosperous, they were helped out of the purse of the big partner. To throw it all away—for what?—upon what blind and reckless incitement—there lay the tragedy.

So we may say of him that his heart was benignant and compassionate, and that where he erred, if error there was, it was out of love for his kind and his country. If there was another quality as strong in him, it was his love of justice. When told that a colleague denied him any power of administration, he chuckled reminiscently. "And perhaps they were right," he said, and then after a pause, "but at any rate I gave them justice."

Justice, fidelity, compassion, these qualities, which were enthroned in the heart of Edward Carson, are what men seek in a leader, and when they find them, which is but seldom, they gratefully call him great.

THE END

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